TONIO

SON OF THE SIERRAS

GENERAL CHARLES KING

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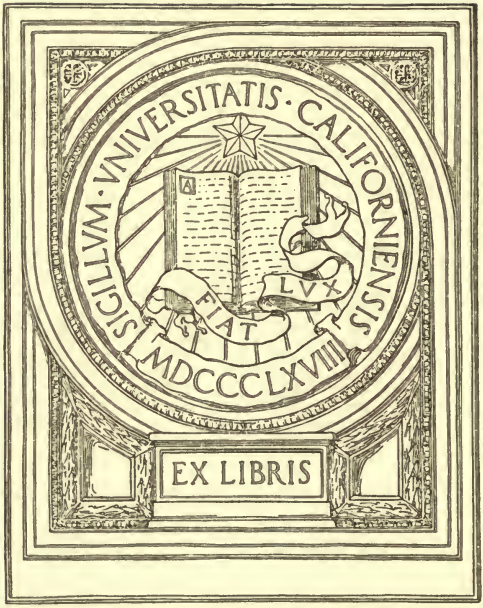

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Tonio, Son of the Sierras, erect and slender.
Frontispiece

TONIO

SON OF THE SIERRAS

A Story of the Apache War

BY

GENERAL CHARLES KING

AUTHOR OF

"NORMAN HOLT," "THE IRON BRIGADE," "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "A DAUGHTER OF THE SIOUX," ETC.

Illustrations by

CHARLES J. POST

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TONIO

SON OF THE SIERRAS

CHAPTER I

"Does it never rain here?" asked the Latest Arrival, with sudden shift of the matter under discussion.

"How is that, Bentley?" said the officer addressed to the senior present, the surgeon. "You've been here longest."

"Don't know, I'm sure," was the languid answer. "I've only been here three years. Try 'Tonio there. He was born hereabouts."

So the eyes of the six men turned to the indicated authority, an Apache of uncertain age. He looked to be forty and might be nearer sixty. He stood five feet ten in his tiptoed moccasins, and weighed less than little Harris, who could not touch the beam at five feet five. Harris was the light weight of the —th Cavalry, in physique, at least, and by no means proud of the distinction. To offset the handicap of lack of stature and weight, and of almost cat-like elasticity of frame and movement, he saw fit to cultivate a deliberation and dignity of manner that in his cadet days had started the sobriquet of "Heavy," later altered to "Hefty"; and Hefty Harris he was to the very hour this story opens —a junior first lieutenant with four years' record of stirring service in the far West, in days when the telegraph had not yet strung the Arizona deserts, and the railway was undreamed of. He had only just returned

to the post from a ten days' scout, 'Tonio, the Apache, being his chief trailer and chosen companion on this as on many a previous trip. The two made an odd combination, having little in common beyond that imperturbable self-poise and dignity. The two elsewhere had met with marked success in "locating" *rancherias* of the hostile bands, and in following and finding marauding parties. The two were looked upon in southern Arizona as "the best in the business," and now, because other leaders had tried much and accomplished little, it had pleased the general commanding the Division of the Pacific to say to his subordinate, the general commanding the Department of Arizona, that as the "Tonto" Apaches and their fellows of the Sierra Blanca seemed too wily for his scouting parties sent out from Whipple Barracks, and the valley garrisons of McDowell and Verde, it might be well to detach Lieutenant Harris from his troop at old Camp Bowie and send him, with 'Tonio, to report to the commanding officer at Camp Almy.

Now the commanding general of Arizona had thought of that project himself, and rejected it for two reasons: first, that the officers and men on duty at Almy would possibly take it as a reflection; second, that 'Tonio would probably take it as an affront to himself. 'Tonio, be it understood, was of the Apache Mohave tribe, whose hunting grounds had long been the upper Verde and adjacent mountains. 'Tonio had no scruples as to scouting and shooting Chiricahuas and Sierra Blancas or the roving bands of Yaquis that sometimes ventured across the "Gadsden Purchase" from Mexico. 'Tonio

had done vengeful work among these fellows. But now he was brought face to face with a far different proposition. The renegades of northern Arizona in the earliest of the seventies were mainly Tontos, but many a young brave of the Apache Mohave tribe had cast his lot with them. Many had taken their women and children, and 'Tonio would be hunting, possibly, his own flesh and blood. The junior general had ventured to remonstrate by letter, even when issuing the order indicated, but the senior stood to his prerogative with a tenacity that set the junior's teeth on edge, and started territorial and unbecoming comparisons between the division commander's firmness on the fighting line a decade earlier, and far behind it now. San Francisco was perhaps five hundred miles from the scene of hostilities, and those farthest away seldom fail to see clearer than those on the spot, and to think they know better, so Harris and his dusky henchman came up to Almy with little by way of welcome, and back from their first scout with nothing by way of result. Therefore, the sextette of officers that had been but lukewarm at the start became lavish in cordiality at the close. The failure of Harris, the favorite of the chieftain of the big Division, meant that no further criticism could attach to them. If Harris could accomplish nothing worth mention, what could be expected of others?

Therefore, while awaiting the return of the courier sent up to Prescott, with report of what Harris had not accomplished, and asking instructions as to what the gentleman would have next, the commanding officer of the old post, built by California volunteers during the

Civil War and garrisoned later by reluctant regulars, set a good example to his subordinates by doing his best to console the " casuals," as visitors were officially rated, and his subordinates loyally followed suit.

But Harris seemed unresponsive. Harris seemed almost sulky. Harris had added silence to dignity, and spent long hours of a sunny day sprawled in a hammock, smoking his pipe and studying 'Tonio, who squatted in the shade at the end of the narrow porch of the old officers' mess building, still more silent and absorbed than his young commander.

And this was the condition of things when the Latest Arrival appeared on the scene, fresh from head-quarters, some ninety miles northwest and two thousand feet higher. He had come late the previous afternoon. He had skated down the flinty scarp of Misery Hill, with the wheels of his buckboard locked, and hauled up at the adjutant's in a cloud of dust and misapprehension, with barely time for a bath and a shave before dinner. He was a new aide-de-camp of the department commander. He had served him well and won his notice on Indian campaigns afar to the north in the Columbia valley, where gum boots and slickers were as indispensable as here they were superfluous. He had never been, he said, so dry in his life as when he scrambled from his mud-colored chariot to the steps of the official residence. The temporal wants had been spiritually removed, but not the impression. Now, some eighteen hours later, he wished to know if it never rained at Almy, and there was no white man could tell him. So, one and all, they

looked to 'Tonio, whose earliest recollections were of the immediate neighborhood.

And 'Tonio proved a reluctant witness. Urged by Stannard, the senior captain referred to, Harris put the question in "Pidgin" Apache, and 'Tonio, squatting still, gazed dreamily away toward the huge bulwark of Squadron Peak, and waited for respectful cessation of all talk before he would answer.

At last he rose to his full height and, with a sweeping gesture the length of his arm, pointed to the domelike summit, dazzling in the slant of the evening sunshine, that seemingly overhung the dun-colored adobe corrals on the flats to the south, yet stood full five miles away. 'Tonio so seldom opened his lips to speak that the six men listened with attention they seldom gave to one another. Yet what 'Tonio said was translatable only by Harris:

"When the picacho hides his head in the clouds, then look for rain."

"Lord," said the doctor, "I doubt if ever I've seen a cloud above it—much less on it! If it weren't for the creek yonder the whole post would shrivel up and blow away. Even the hygrometer's dead of disuse—or dry rot. But, talk of drying up, did you ever see the beat of him?" and the doctor was studying anatomy as displayed in this particular Apache.

Five feet ten 'Tonio stood before them, not counting the thatch of his matted black hair, bound with white cotton turban. Five feet ten in height, but so gaunt and wiry that the ribs and bones seemed breaking through the tawny skin, that in flank and waist and the long

sweep of his sinewy, fleshless legs, he rivalled the greyhound sprawled at his feet. "'Tonio has not half an ounce of fat in his hide," said Harris, in explaining his tireless work on the trail. "'Tonio can go sixty miles without a gulp of water and come out fresh as a daisy at the end." 'Tonio's eminently fit condition had been something Harris ever held in envy and emulation, yet on this recent scout even 'Tonio had failed him. 'Tonio had complained. To look at him as he stood there now, erect, slender, with deep chest and long, lank arms and legs, trammelled only by the white cotton breechclout that looped over the waist belt and trailed, fore and aft, below the bony knee, his back and shoulders covered by white *camisa* unfastened at the throat and chest, his feet cased in deerskin moccasins, the long leggings of which hung in folds at the ankles, one could liken him only to the coyote—the half-famished wolf of the sage plain and barren, for even the greyhound knew thirst and fatigue,—knew how to stretch at full length and luxury in the shade, whereas 'Tonio, by day at least, stood or squatted. Never in all their long prowlings, by day or night, among the arid deserts or desolate ranges along the border, had Harris known his chief trailer and scout to hint at such a thing as weariness. Yet, within the week gone by, thrice had he declared himself unable to go farther. Did it mean that at last 'Tonio would purposely fail him, now that there were some of his own people among the renegades?

'Tonio had stoutly denied such a weakness. The few young men with the hostiles, said he, were more Tonto than Mohave—fools who had offended their brothers and

dishonored their tribe. Chiefs, medicine men, even the women, he said, disowned them. The braves would kill, and the women spurn, them on sight. 'Tonio pointed to the "hound" scouts with the Verde company—Hualpais, some of them—splendid specimens from the mountains; Apache Yumas, some of them, not quite the peer of the Hualpais; but many of them—most of them, in fact—Apache Mohaves, fiercest, surest trailers of the wild Red Rock country, familiar with every cañon and crag in all the rude range from Snow Lake to the Sierra Blanca. "All brothers," protested 'Tonio. "All soldiers. All braves, unafraid of a thousand Tontos, eager only to meet and punish their traitor fellows who had taken the White Chief's pay and bread, pledged their best services and then gone renegading to the fastnesses of the Mogollon," adding with scorn unspeakable, "taking *other* women with them."

And still Harris was not content. Harris had sent a runner back when the scout was but half finished, with a note to be relayed to Prescott, to tell the general of his ill success and his evil suspicions, and the chief being himself out a-hunting, what did his chief of staff do but order the Newly Arrived down to Almy to meet the home-coming party and see for himself—and his general!

And of all men chosen to meddle in matters concerning "Hefty" Harris, perhaps the latest suitable, in some ways, was his classmate and comrade lieutenant, though in different arms of the service—Hal Willett of "The Lost and Strayed," so called from the fact that they had been sent to desert wilds in '65, scattered over three

territories, and despite some hard fighting and many hard knocks, had never, said their detractors, been heard from since.

Rivals they had been in cadet days and more than one pursuit. Rivals they still were in the field of arms, for the name Harris had won for himself in Arizona Willett had matched in the Columbia, and now, fresh from the ill-starred campaign of the Lava Beds, was one of the few men to get something better than hard knocks, censure and criticism. Until the previous evening, not since the day they parted at West Point had they set eyes one on the other, and, knowing nothing of what had gone before and never dreaming of what would come to pass, a benighted bureau officer had sent the one down to find out what was the matter with the other.

And thereby hangs this tale.

For, as luck would have it, there was even then stationed in that far-away land a luckless lieutenant-colonel of infantry who had started with good prospects in the Civil War, had early been given command of a brigade of volunteers and within the month had had his raw concourse of undrilled, undisciplined levies swept from under him in the first fierce onset at Shiloh. What else could have been expected of men to whom arms had been issued but ten days before, and who had not yet learned which end to bite from the cartridge? Hurled from his terrified horse, the general had been picked up senseless, to see no more of fighting until Stone's River, eight months later, where with a more seasoned command the same thing happened. And still he persisted, when well of an ugly wound, and, while juniors in years and length

of service were now heading corps and divisions, with double stars on their shoulders, and he had to begin again with a brigade, he got into line for Chickamauga with his usual luck just within range of the fatal gap left by a senior in command—the gap through which poured the impetuous gray torrent of the Southland—and for the third time everything crumbled away in spite of him, while he was left for dead upon the field. He had done his best, as had other men, and had fared only the worst. It was a case of three times and out. The impatient North had no more use for names linked only with disaster. When, finally exchanged, he limped back to duty, they put him on courts, boards and other back-door business until the war was over, then sent him to the Pacific Slope, with the blanket brevet of March, 1865, and here he was, eight long years thereafter, "The General" by way of title, without the command; silver leaves where once gleamed the stars on his shoulders; silver streaks where once rippled chestnut and gold; wrinkled of visage and withered in shank; kindly, patient, yet pathetic; "functioning" a four-company post in a far-away desert, with grim mountain chains on east and west, arid waters on every side of him, four long weeks and four thousand miles by mail route from home, and much longer by sea; with nothing to do but send out scouts, sign papers, sing an old song or two when the spirit moved him; with not a thing in his soldier past to be ashamed of, nothing much in his soldier present to rejoice in, nothing whatever in his soldier future to hope for, finding his companionship in the comrades about him, and his sweetest comfort in

the unswerving love of a devoted wife, and their one unstinted pride and delight, Lilian, their only daughter —their only surviving child.

Many of these eight years of what then was exile, while he, at first as a major of foot, was campaigning in regions long since reclaimed from savagery, and rusticating at frontier forts long since forgotten, Lilian and her mother had dwelt in lodgings at "The Bay" that the child might have the advantage of San Francisco's schools. Only once each year, until of late, had he been able to visit them, usually at Christmas-tide, but by every runner, courier, stage or post there came to them his cheery letters, bearing such old-time, outlandish post-marks or headings as "Lapwai," "Three Forks, Owyhee," and later "Hualpai," or "Hassayampa," until finally it became mild, civilized, pacific, even "Almy."

The uniform of a general, that the law had let him wear just as long in peace as had been the war in years, was finally packed in camphorated hope of resurrection, and the garb of actual rank resumed in 1870. He could bear the title *ad infinitum,* but not the sign.

The silver leaf, as said, had come to replace the worn and tarnished gold by '73, then mountain fever had seized and laid him by the heels, and then all the Indians in Arizona, or the army women out of it, could not dissuade Mrs. Archer from her duty. She and Lilian were the heroines of a buckboard ride from Drum Barracks to the Colorado, from the Colorado to Prescott, from Prescott down through wild and tortuous cañons

to and beyond the valley of the Verde—to the wondering eyes of the waiting garrison and the welcoming arms of the fond husband and father at Almy.

And this was but the week gone by, just before the "Newly Arrived" had reached Prescott—just before "Hefty" Harris had returned from scout. Not until this very morning—the first since their reunion of that warm, yet winter's evening of the previous day—had the two classmates set eyes on Miss Archer (it was as she rode away by her father's side for a canter up the valley), and not until this late afternoon, as the sun was dipping behind the black range of the Mazatzal, did they have opportunity to speak with her.

Even as 'Tonio stood, silent and statuesque, while the doctor went on record as to the rainfall of the Verde watershed, there came suddenly into view, jogging quietly up the winding road from the lower ford, three riders, followed by half a pack of lagging, yapping hounds—"The Old Man," the maiden and the orderly—and all men on the wooden porch of the unpainted mess building, rose to their feet in deference to the united "powers above," rank and age, youth and beauty, and presently the commander was saying for the benefit of the two new-comers: "My daughter, gentlemen. Lilian, Mr. Harris, Mr. Willett."

Inadvertently he had named them in the inverse order of rank—a small matter, though Willett had been promoted to his bar a year ahead of Harris. Otherwise, it was with a fair field and no favor the old-time rivals of cadet days stood for the first time in the

presence of the only army girl at that moment to be found in the far-flung shadow of the Mazatzal—stood side by side, facing both the starter and the prize in what was destined to be the last great contest of their lives.

CHAPTER II

"COME and dine with us this evening, you two," the "Old Man" was saying, a few minutes later. He had been home long enough to consult the "Commanding General," as he frequently referred to that smiling better half, and to compare notes as to the condition of the larder and cellar. He had flung conventionality to the winds, as most of us had to in early Arizona days. "You others," he said, "have suffered so often from my steaks and stories, you're glad not to be included. To-day I'm bidding only these two youngsters. You know our dining table holds only six. "No, never mind about the call!" he interposed, with uplifted hands, one to receive the toddy Briggs was stirring for him, the other in kindly protest, for both the youngsters were on their feet confusedly striving to make it understood that they had only been waiting for the cool of the evening to come to pay their respects. "And never mind about spike tail and shirt fronts either—come just as you are!"

"Indeed, I'll *have* to, sir," said Willett, whose undress uniform fitted him like a glove and was cut and made by the then expert military artist of the far East. They had not taken it too kindly, these others in white cotton sack coats, hewed and stitched by the company tailor, or even in canvas shooting rig, as was Harris,

that the young aide-de-camp, after brief siesta in the mid-day lazy hour, should have appeared among them all, fresh-shaved and tubbed, and in faultless, bran-new, spick-and-span cap and blouse and trousers, with black silk socks and low-cut patent leather "Oxford ties." Harris, hammock slung, and moodily studying 'Tonio, looked approvingly, but made no remark whatever. Stannard, ever blunt and short of speech, had shoved his hairy hands deep in his trousers' pockets, a thing no sub would twice venture in his presence, looked Willett over from head to foot, then, with a sniff, had turned away, but Bentley and Turner had indulged in whimsical protest, "Gad, man, but you put us all to shame," said the surgeon. "I've seen no rig to match that since I came to this post. It's rarer than rain."

"What *do* you wear when you call on the commanding officer?" queried the Latest Arrival, with jovial good-nature. "Thank you, Briggs. That *was* a good toddy."

"Never had a family here until this week," said Bentley, "and such calling as I've done has been in what I happened to have on, and even then I've wished we dressed like 'Tonio there. Why, Mr. Willett, only once since I came to this post has there been an officer's daughter with us. Only twice has there been an officer's wife. Even Mrs. Archer wouldn't have tried it if the general hadn't been sick."

Willett laughed again, good-naturedly as before. "Well," said he, "in the field 'The Lost and Strayed' didn't dandy much, but here I had not even unpacked my trunk; had a whole buckboard to myself after we

left Captain Wickham at the Big Bug, so I just fetched 'em along. This is light, you see—nothing but serge," and he held forth his arm. "Up there, of course, we had no use for white. Gunboats and 'plebeskins' was full dress half the year round——" And just then it had occurred to him to put that question: "Does it never rain here?" and in so doing he had appealed rather to Stannard and his fellows of the line, quite as though he thought Bentley doing too much of the talk, especially since Bentley's bent was criticising. But Stannard, as we have seen, had referred back the question, whereat the doctor, defrauded of his game, yawned languidly and turned over the matter to 'Tonio, thus dragging Harris, all unwilling, into the tide of talk, and presently out of his hammock. Next thing noticed of him he had disappeared.

To no man as yet, save the lieutenant-colonel commanding, had Willett told the purpose of his coming. Late the previous evening Archer had come to his office to receive the aide-de-camp, and there listened to his message. "The Old Man" looked up suddenly as he sat in the lamplight at the rude wooden table that served for his official desk, surprise and concern mingling in his kindly face.

"The *general* said that?" he asked.

"No, sir: the adjutant-general who was left in charge. The general is away hunting."

"I might have known that," said Archer to his inner self. To the aide-de-camp he merely bowed—bowed most courteously. He liked boys, and the Lord

had seen fit to take back to himself the one lad poor Archer had liked most, and loved unspeakably.

"I think I shall say—nothing of it," said he, presently, after some reflection, "and—you can find out, through Harris, all there is to be told."

And not a word had he said, even to the post adjutant, from the moment of Willett's reporting to him at nine the night before, yet every man of the officers' mess knew well that something had sent the young staff officer to Almy—that something was to be looked into—and every man, including Harris, felt it in his bones that that something was the recent and unprofitable scout. That being the case, it placed them all on the defensive, and Willett, unhappily, upon his mettle.

A silence fell upon the party when it was found Harris was gone. 'Tonio himself had risen again, had stood gazing awhile along the eastward mountains, tumbling up toward a brazen sky, then had slowly vanished from sight round the corner of the adobe wall.

"Sticks closer'n a brother," said Stannard, epigrammatically, with a look at Turner, his comrade captain, whereat the latter shot a warning glance, first at Stannard, then toward the unconscious N. A., now hobnobbing with Briggs at the mess-room door.

"Harris doesn't like the young swell! What's the matter, d'ye s'pose?" asked Bucketts, the post quartermaster, a man of much weight, but not too much discrimination.

"Bosh! They're classmates and old chums," was Stannard's quick reply. "Harris is hipped because

his scout was a fizzle, and he simply doesn't feel like talking."

"All the same, he doesn't like Willett, classmate or no classmate. You mark my words," persisted the man of mops and brooms, and Stannard, who had seen the youngster's face as he turned away, knew well the quartermaster was right. Therefore was it his duty, for the sake of the regiment, said he, to stand by Harris as hailing from the cavalry. He scoffed at the quartermaster and began to pace the veranda. 'Twas high time for evening stables, and the brief and perfunctory grooming the short-coupled, stocky little mountain climbers daily received. The herds had been driven in, watering in the shallows as they forded the stream full fifteen minutes before. There were only the surgeon, the adjutant, the quartermaster, and Lieutenant Willett seated on the veranda when Harris presently came back, silent as before, but clad in undress uniform, as neat and trim as that of the Latest Arrival, if not so new. Then came General Archer, his daughter, and the meeting. Then, a few minutes later, the bid to dinner, and then, barely an hour from that time, the dinner itself—a function the classmates marched to almost arm in arm when either would rather have been without the other.

The members of what there was of the mess, six officers in all, sat waiting the summons to their own board, and gazing idly after. Stannard, the only married captain whose wife had had the nerve to go to that desolate and distant station, was sitting under his own figurative vine and fig-tree represented by a pine ve-

randa, about which neither vine nor fig nor other tree had ever been induced to grow, but that was not without other extravagances, since it represented to Uncle Sam an aggregate sum that could be best computed at a shilling a shingle. Stannard, hearing footsteps on the sandy soil, glanced up from the columns of an *Alta California,* ten days old, and growled through the adjacent blinds "They're coming now," whereat there was sound of rustling skirt within, and between the slats there came a glimpse of shining, big blue eyes, alive with womanly interest, and parted lips disclosing two opposing rows of almost perfect teeth, all the whiter by contrast with the sunburned, "sonsy" face that framed them. Together, yet separated, this Darby and Joan of the far frontier sat and watched the coming pair. "Isn't it good to see the real uniform again?" said she. "Isn't it absurd to think of trying a dinner here?" said he. Then both subsided as the two young officers stepped upon the resounding boards of the next veranda to the south, knocked at the commander's open door and were promptly welcomed.

"Now, Luce, they're going to have a very *nice* dinner," protested Mrs. Stannard. "I was in there helping over an hour, and Mrs. Archer's a wonder! Even if the dinner didn't amount to much, there would be Lilian."

"They can't eat *her,*" persisted, grimly, the man.

"She looks sweet enough to eat," responded the woman. "You ought to see her. After a six hours' ride she looks fresh as a daisy, all creamy white with—but you wouldn't understand——"

"What on earth kept them out so long?"

"Didn't I tell you? Why, they went away to Bennett's ranch. Couldn't find a vestige of vegetables nearer. Mrs. Bennett has a little patch where she raises lettuce and radishes. The orderly carried a basket full of truck, and leaves and flowers, poppies and cactus, you know, and you've no idea how pretty they've made the table look."

Stannard sniffed. "Take their Sauterne hot or lukewarm?" he asked. "Fancy a dinner without ice, fruit or cream!"

"Of course they haven't white wine here, Luce! But there's claret—famous claret, too, and the water in the big *olla's* even cooler than the spring. They'll have French dressing for the salad. They have tomato soup even *you* couldn't growl at, and roast chicken, with real potatoes, and *petits pois,* and corn, and olives; then salad cool as the spring; then there's to be such an *omelette soufflée*—and coffee!—but it's the way the table *looks,* Luce!"

"Men don't care how a thing looks, so long as it tastes right. How *does* it look?"

"So white and fresh, and sprinkled with green and purple and crimson, the leaves and the poppies, you know. She—" But Mrs. Stannard broke off suddenly. "What is it, Wettstein?" she asked, for their own particular *chef,* a German trooper, with elementary culinary gifts, appeared in the hallway.

"It's Suey, mattam, says would Mrs. Stannard come over a minute. He's stuck, mattam."

"Stuck! Heavens! how?" cried Mrs. Stannard, up

at once in alarm, and vanishing through the dim light of the blanketed window. The presumably punctured Chinaman was even then in full flight for his own kitchen door, some fifty feet away, and Mrs. Stannard followed. No Roman in Rome's quarrel was ever more self-sacrificing than were our army women of the old days in their helpfulness. Had the hounds ravished the roast again, as once already had happened? If so, the Stannard dinner stood ready to replace it, even though she and her captain had to fall back on what could be borrowed from the troop kitchen. No, the oven door was open, the precious chickens, brown, basted and done to a turn, were waiting Suey's deft hands to shift them to the platter. (No need to heat it even on a December day.) Mrs. Stannard's quick and comprehensive glance took in every detail. The "stick" was obviously figurative—mere vernacular—yet something serious, for Suey's olive-brown skin was jaundiced with worry, and the face of Doyle, the soldier striker, as he came hurrying back from the banquet board, was beading with the sweat of mental torment. Soup, it seems, was already served, and Doyle burst forth, hoarse whispering, before ever he caught sight of the visiting angel.

"Sure I *can't,* Suey! *The General's sittin' on it!*"

And Suey's long-nailed Mongolian talons went up in despair as he turned appealingly to their rescuer.

"Sitting on what, Doyle? Quick!" said Mrs. Stannard.

"The sherry, ma'am! The doctor sent it over wid his comps to s'prise him, an' my orders was to fill the

little glasses when I'd took in the soup, an' I put it under the barrel chair——"

But Mrs. Stannard had heard enough. Even though convulsed with merriment, she seized a pencil and scribbled a little line on a card. "Give this to Mrs. Archer," she said, and a moment later, in the midst of his first story, the veteran was checked by these placid words from the head of the table:

"Pardon me, dear, but you are on the lid of the wine cooler. Let Doyle get at it a moment."

The general was not the nimblest-witted man in the service, but long experience had taught him the wisdom of prompt observance of any suggestion that came from his wife. Dropping his napkin, and the thread of his tale, he rose to his feet. Blushing furiously, Doyle bent, and with vigorous effort pried off a circular, perforated top, revealing a dark, cylindrical space beneath, from the depths of which he lifted a dripping bucket of galvanized iron, and sped, thus laden, away to the kitchen, to the music of Mrs. Archer's merry laughter and a guffaw of joy from the general's lips.

"How came you to put it there, sir?" demanded he, a moment later, as Doyle circumnavigated the table, filling, as ordered, the five little glasses with fragrant Amontillado. "I must tell you, gentlemen, this is one of the pleasant surprises that most admirable woman yonder is forever putting up on me. Life would be a desert without such."

"Indeed it wasn't mine!" expostulated madam, "though I'm deeply indebted to somebody. Who was it, Doyle?"

"Docther Bentley, ma'am. He said I was to keep it dark, ma'am—an' in the coolest place I could find——"

But here the peals of laughter silenced the words and rang the glad tidings to listening, waiting ears in the kitchen that all was well. Mrs. Stannard scurried away to explain to her Luce, and the dinner went blithely on.

"You did right, Doyle! you did right!" shouted the general, "and we'll drink the doctor's health. Keep it dark, indeed! Haw, haw, haw!" And then nothing would do but he must tell the story of this precious and particular chair. Furniture, even such as he bought at San Francisco, and would live to a green old age along the Pacific, came speedily to pieces in the hot, dry atmosphere of Arizona. Little enough there was of cabinet ware, to be sure, because of the cost of transportation; but such as there was, unless riveted in every seam and joint, fell apart at most inopportune moments. Bureaus and washstands, tables, sofas and chairs, were forever shedding some more or less important section, and the only reliable table was that built by the post carpenter, the quartermaster.

And so these pioneers of our civilization, the men and women of the army, had had no little experience in cabinetmaking and upholstering. While the emigrants and settlers, secure under its wing, could turn swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, as saith the Scriptures, their soldier folk turned clothing boxes into couches, soap boxes into cradles, and pork barrels into *fauteuils*. Chintz and calico, like charity, covered a multitude of sins, as declared in unsightly cracks and

knotholes. The finest reclining chair in all Camp Almy belonged to the doctor, a composite of condemned stretchers and shelter tent. The best dining-room set was sawed out from sugar barrels, and, being stuffed with old newspapers and gayly covered with cheese cloth and calico, rivaled in comfort, if not in airy elegance, the twisted woodwork of Vienna. When it was known that Mrs. and Miss Archer had descended upon the camp, and their beloved commander had next to nothing by way of furniture with which to deck their army home, every officer hastened to place his household goods —such "C. and G.E." as did not belong to the hospital —at the general's disposal. The Stannards sent three riveted, cane-bottomed, dining-room chairs and their spare room outfit complete. Captain Turner, whose fair-complected partner had not yet ventured to these destructive suns, sent bedstead and bureau, the latter without knobs, but you could pry the drawers open with the point of a sabre. The post trader drove up from the store with a lot of odds and ends. Even the bachelors were keen to do something. All of which Mrs. Archer most gratefully and smilingly accepted and made mental note of for future return in kind. But, in spite of the Stannards' contribution, the general stood firmly to his prerogative and sat close on his throne—"The finest dining chair in all Arizona, sir," as he often declared. "Sawed out from a standard oak whiskey barrel at Old Fort Buford in '58, according to my own ideas and lines, and sound as a dollar to-day, sir, and it's only been covered three times in all. Look at it!" And here, with a flourish, he would whip off the seat.

"Combination chair and butler's pantry, sir. Used to keep my whiskey and tobacco there when the redskins had the run of the post and thought nothing of searching our quarters. And now Doyle's used it as the doctor prescribed, and then gone and forgotten it! Haw, haw, haw! By Jove, but that's capital sherry! Cool almost as if it had been iced! Harris, my boy, you don't drink!"

There was a moment's silence. Then the young officer answered, simply, yet almost apologetically:

"Why— I never have, sir."

CHAPTER III.

It happened at a moment when Willett, seated at the right of "the lady of the house," with Lilian at his dexter side, had caught the eye of his hostess, and, after the manner of the day, had raised his brimming sherry glass and, bowing low, was drinking to her health, a feat the general had thrice performed already. "If I'd only known of this, gentlemen," said their host, but a moment earlier, with resultant access of cordiality, "and could have found a drop of Angostura about the post, we'd have had a 'pick-me-up' before dinner, but d'you know I—I seldom have bitters about me. I've no use for cocktails. I never touch a drop of stingo before twelve at noon or after twelve at night. I agree with old Bluegrass. Bluegrass was post surgeon at the Presidio when the Second Artillery came out in '65, right on the heels of the war, and he did his best to welcome them—especially Breck, their adjutant, also a Kentuckian. Then he was ordered East, and he left Breck his blessing, his liquor case, and this admonition —Breck told it himself. 'Young man,' said he, 'I observe you drink cocktails. Now, take my advice and don't do it. You drink the bitters and they go to your nose and make it red. You drink the sugar and it goes to your brain and makes it wopsy, and so—you lose all the good effects of the whiskey'! Haw, haw, haw!" It

was a story the genial old soldier much rejoiced in, one that Stannard had bet he would tell before dinner was half over, and it came with Doyle and the chickens. The kindly, wrinkled, beaming face, red with the fire of Arizona's suns, redder by contrast with the white mustache and imperial, was growing scarlet with the flame of Bentley's cherished wine, when in sudden surprise he noted that the junior officer present, seated alone at his right (there was no other girl in all Camp Almy to bid to the little feast, and Mrs. Stannard, in mourning for a brother, could not accept), had turned down the little sherry glass. Thirty years ago such a thing was as uncommon in the army as fifty years ago it was unheard of in civil life. For one instant after the young officer's embarrassed answer the veteran sat almost as though he had heard a rebuke. It was Mrs. Archer who came to the relief of an awkward situation. "Mr. Harris believes in keeping in training," she ventured lightly. "He could not excel in mountain scouting without it. The general's scouting days are over and we indulge him." Indeed, it wasn't long before it began to look as though the general were indulging himself. Claret presently succeeded the sherry, but not until Bentley's health had been drunk again and the orderly summoned from the front porch to go, with the general's compliments, and tell him so. "This claret," he then declared, "is some I saved from the dozen Barry & Patton put aboard the Montana when I came round to Yuma last year. It's older than Lilian," this with a fond and playful pinch at the rosy cheek beside him, "and almost as good. No diluting this, Mr. Wil-

lett," for he saw that young officer glancing from the empurpled glass to the single carafe that adorned the table, its mate having met dissolution when the general's chest was prematurely unloaded in Dead Man's Cañon *en route* to the post. "Dilute your California crudities all you like, but not the red juice from the sunny vines of France. No, sir! Moreover, this and old Burgundy are the wines you must drink at blood heat. No Sauturnes or Hocks or champagnes for us fire worshippers in Arizona! Lilian here and my blessed wife yonder don't like these red wines for that reason. They want something to cool their dainty palates, but men, sir, and soldiers— What's this, Bella, Bellisima? Salad— French dressing—and cool, too! Bravissima, my dear! How did you manage it? The olla? Why, of course! Cool anything. Cool my old head, if need be. Hey, Willett?"

And all this time, when not chatting with the debonair officer at her side or saying a word to his bronzed, sun-dried, silently observant comrade opposite, Lilian's fond eyes forever sought her father's rubicund face, love and admiration in every glance. All this time, even while in cordial talk with her guests, Mrs. Archer never seemed to lose a look or word from her soldier liege; never once did her winsome smile or joyous laugh fail to reward his sallies; never once came there shade of anxiety upon her beaming face. "The General" was the head of that house, and they were his loyal subjects. They even sipped at the outermost ripple of the thimbleful of claret each had permitted Doyle to pour. Even when a loud "cloop" in the dark passageway to

the kitchen told that another bottle was being opened as the omelet came in, borne aloft by white-robed Suey, crowned with red poppies and blue blazes, and set triumphantly before the mistress of the feast, Harris could detect no flurtter of disapprobation. Even when, later still, the general's eager hand, stretching forth for the dusky flagon (it was sacrilege to sweep away those insignia of age and respectability), managed to capsize the candelabrum and sent the fluid " adamantine " spattering a treasured table-cloth (how quick the dash of the young trooper's hand upon the flame—and its extinction!), a gentle smile was the sole rebuke, followed by a " Thank you, Mr. Harris. I hope you didn't burn your hand! That's all my fault. The general declared it foolish to put candles on the table when we could have sconces by the dozen on the walls.

Indeed, there must have been a dozen candles, not to mention the big lamps of forbidden kerosene upon shelf and sideboard, each backed by its reflector of glistening tin. " We were vain, you see," continued Mrs. Archer, " of our two old-fashioned heirlooms. Those quaint three-socket sticks were brought by the general's grandfather from England in Colonial days." It was so with everything they had, though they had so little. The massive silver forks, the worn old spoons, the squat little sugar bowl and creamer that came in later, all bore a crest and a single word. All had been " The General's " before ever that well-descended veteran had bent the knee in wooing. All had been stored in San Francisco until their coming to cheer his exile, but now were duly paraded in honor of their first guests at Almy, the

young scout leader from the southern border, and his classmate, the new aide-de-camp of the commanding general; both, as was understood, to leave them on the morrow.

And all this time, too, though the windows, Arizona fashion, were blanketed to exclude all heatful light throughout the day (those of the dining-room being hidden behind Navajo fabrics in black and white, and blue and crimson), the hallways were wide open that no breath of air might be lost. The hounds clustered whimpering and wondering at the doorways, front and rear, resentful of the vigilance with which the orderlies on duty withstood their dashes, they who long weeks and months had had the run of the house. Darkness had settled down upon the sandy parade. The lights gleamed along the opposite front, the long barracks of the soldiery, and the stars were glinting bright above the beetling pine crests beyond the murmuring stream. Over at the mess the surgeon, the adjutant, quartermaster, Captain Bonner of the infantry, with his subaltern, and solemn Captain Turner, sat on the veranda, smoked their pipes, and even while keeping up a semblance of talk, had an eye and an ear on the bungalow—the "Old Man's" quarters not three hundred feet away. The boom of his jovial laughter still rang out upon the air, and presently the tinkle of guitar, the swish of feminine garments, the rasp of chairs and the merry mingling of voices told that the little dinner party, the first the camp had ever known—for what is a dinner party without women—had quit the table and gathered on the porch. By this time, too, an unclouded moon had sailed aloft

from behind the screen of eastward heights, and its beams were pouring slantwise upon the group, that portion of it, at least, that now was seated near the southern end. They who watched were not slow to see that Lilian had taken a chair within a few feet of the edge, with Willett still in close attendance. The red heart of the general's cigar was visible midway between the window and the central doorway, but the jovial host was wrapped in shade. The light from the doorway fell upon the white gown of Mrs. Archer and the trim, slender, undersized figure of Lieutenant Harris, standing before her. They heard the general's voice, cordial and resonant, uplifted presently in protest: "No, don't go yet, boy. Let 'Tonio take care of himself to-night. I want you both to hear Lilian sing. Here, orderly, you go find 'Tonio and give him my compliments— No! you just tell 'Tonio *I* want to see him."

The orderly with Archer, as with many another post commander, was the final resort, the cure-all, the infallible means of settlement of all matters in dispute. The orderly went and stood not on the order of his going. He knew not 'Tonio, nor where to find him, but he knew better than to say so—to say anything. He went straightway to the sergeant of the guard, than whom no man is supposed to know more what is going on about the post. That Harris might have the pleasure of hearing the promised song (he surely could not think of going now) the mess devoutly hoped, and were in nowise too content when the sound of moving, of people getting to their feet, and of Archer's jocund welcome, told that callers had come to join the recent revellers,

and that meant, of course, the Stannards, for there was really no one else. And then it was remembered that Stannard had said that Mrs. Archer had asked that they should come over after dinner, since they could not well attend it. Lilian's singing was something all save these two young soldiers had already heard, enjoyed and longed to hear again, and the mess could not but wish that old Stannard had not been so exact in his interpretation, and punctual in his acceptance of that invitation. There followed a few minutes of general talk and laughter, and then Archer's voice was again dominant. Nothing would do but that the Stannards both come in and taste that famous claret (which neither desired *after* dinner, however much it might then have been enjoyed). Then all went trooping in-doors again, all save Lilian and Lieutenant Harris, for presently these two came sauntering into the moonlight at the southward end of the veranda. The girl resumed her seat and guitar; the young officer the chair lately occupied by Willett, and here full ten minutes were they in conversation when the orderly came stalking back from the guard-house; the quintette came flocking forth from the hallway, and Willett, coming to resume his seat and chat, found his classmate in possession. It was the first opportunity that had fallen to Harris, and if Willett hoped or expected that he would rise and surrender in his favor he was doomed to disappointment. Harris never so much as turned his head.

They were an odd contrast, these two young graduates of the nation's soldier school, as they looked to Captain Stannard that November night. He spoke of it

to his wife and thought of it long after, for he, too, had come toward the little group a bit impatient, it must be owned, of the general's mellow monologue, and wearying of a conversation in which *he* had no part. But here again Stannard found scant opportunity. Miss Archer, bending slightly forward, was, with much animation describing to Mr. Harris the brilliant ball given by the artillery at the Presidio just before they were hurried off to that fatal Modoc war. Harris, caring little for the affair, and possibly hearing little of what she was saying, sat as though drinking in every word, and gazing enthralled upon the beauty of her sweet young face. He, too, was bending forward, his lithe, slender, supple frame clad in the trim undress uniform of the day, his clear-cut face, with its thin, almost hollow cheeks, tanned brown by the blazing suns of the southern desert, his hair cropped close to his shapely head, his gray-blue eyes, large, full and steady, fixed unswerving upon her. Leaning on his elbow, one lean brown hand was toying with the sun-bleached ends of his mustache, the other, with the class ring gleaming in the moonlight, lay idly on his knee. Lacking stature, size or weight, the physical attributes that make a man impressive, he looked the picture of the young athlete, firm and fit and trained for speed and staying power, yet cold in his steel-like strength and quality.

Overtopping him, standing where he, too, could hear and gaze, elegant in form, graceful in pose, and precise in dress, the picture of chivalric officer and gentleman, Hal Willett had the advantage of nearly six more inches in height, a presence that was at once commanding and

assured, and a face as strikingly handsome as that of Harris was severely plain. Willett's eyes and hair were of a deep, lustrous brown, his eyebrows thick and heavily arched, his mouth soft, sensitive, with lips that were beautifully curved and teeth that were white and well-nigh perfect. His mustache, though long and curling, was carefully trained away so as to hide none of the charms that lurked beneath. He looked at once the knight of the ballroom and the battlefield, a man to make his mark in either contest, love or war, and make it he had. Life had been full of gifts to Harold Willett. He came from old border stock. His name was first of the presidential ten the year he entered the Point, first on the list of cadet corporals in the yearling June and first among the first sergeants the following year. An uncontradicted rumor had it that he could have been sergeant-major, but that he told the commandant his ambition lay in the senior captaincy, and first captain he had been named his first class summer, only to lose it late in August, the penalty of a rash and forbidden exploit for the sake of a smile, and possibly a caress, and lose it to the man who, starting at the foot of the list of his chevroned fellows two years before, had risen only to "late sergeant" of a centre company when they came from furlough, but, standing foremost in "Tactics," well up in every subject but French and drawing, and impeccable in conduct, won a captaincy in spite of his lack of inches. Graduating a dozen files ahead of his brilliant comrade, Harris had sought and won commission in the cavalry, was sent to duty in New Mexico and then in Arizona, ever roughing

it in the deserts or the mountains until in physique he was hard as hickory, and in spirit wellnigh as elastic. Never until this recent experience in the Apache Mohave country had he shown symptom of discouragement. Now it was the more noticeable because coupled, it would seem, with distrust—distrust of him who had been for two years past an inseparable guide and even comrade, 'Tonio, "*gran capitan*" of Indian scouts.

And even as he sat there absorbed in the sweet vision in the moonlight before him, studying the play of her sensitive lips, forgetful for the moment of all else about him, there fell across the glistening boarding at her feet the shadow of a turbaned head, at sight of which she started, with faint, half-suppressed cry of fright; then, as though ashamed, broke into a nervous little laugh. Harris was in an instant on his feet, and whirling, confronted 'Tonio, tall, gaunt, silent, impassive.

"*Que quiere?*" he demanded, in the blunt vernacular of the service. It annoyed him that subordinate of his should thus appear unseen, unheard, unsummoned, and to her affright. He forgot the noiseless sand, the soft-soled moccasins, the native stealth; forgot at the moment the general's mandate and the orderly's mission. It flashed upon him at 'Tonio's quiet answer, grave, unresentful, and in the Apache tongue.

"My chief called me."

"Pardon me just one moment, Miss Archer. I'll come back at once," said Harris, bending over the still trembling girl. Then, turning sharply and bidding 'Tonio follow, his eyes met those of Willett, smiling affably.

"I'll keep it while you're gone, Hefty," said he, with laughing ease of manner, sliding promptly into the vacated seat. "Now, Miss Archer, if you'll be so good as to go right on where you left off, I'll be all gratitude and attention."

Without answer, Harris stepped lightly over to where the general and Stannard were now deep in one-sided argument over the merits of a war-time leader, known well to men of the Union Army east or west; the general declaiming, the junior listening, unconvinced. It was one point on which they differed widely, one on which the general was apt to dilate when warmed by wine. He had had only moderate aid from Willett in disposing of two bottles of sound old claret, and one was enough to set the garrulous tongue to wagging. He would not cease at sight of Harris, standing silent and respectful before him. Stannard had to interpose and say, "You sent for 'Tonio, sir, as I happened to hear," as indeed they all did, far and near, whereat the veteran turned.

"Bless my soul, boy, so I did! What for, I wonder?"

"To save my going over with night orders for the scouts, I think, sir," said Harris promptly, "and, unless you wish to see him personally, I'll tell him now."

"*Must* you make so early a start, Harris? It's only thirty miles to the cañon."

"I know, sir, but I need to be at Bennett's before sunrise. Their scouts would see us if we started later. We go on to the cañon after I have examined that neighborhood."

"All right, then. Buckets will issue rations at once.

Start when you think best. But now, Stannard, see here; if he was such a stayer and so energetic in Virginia, how do you account for——"

But Harris had saluted and turned away, 'Tonio at his heels. As they passed the end of the veranda, where sat Lilian and her listener, Harris noted that the latter had drawn his chair much closer than he had dared, and was bending forward until the handsome dark head was almost over the fair hand toying with the guitar that lay idly in her lap. The modern vernacular for the successful squire of dames was then unknown. The girl, who had been leaning forward, all chat and animation when Harris sat there, now lay dreamily back in the rude but easy chair, her eyelids drooping, her long lashes sweeping the soft cheek, listening, drinking in the murmurous flow of Willett's almost inaudible words, and the stern young face of his classmate hardened in the moonlight, for Harris had seen and heard before. Briefly he gave his instructions to the silent Apache and closed with the sign, "I have spoken. That is all."

But 'Tonio did not stir. Something, possibly, in Willett's devotional attitude vaguely troubled the girl, and, edging back in her chair, she had lifted a little slippered foot from the floor. The general at the moment was talking loud enough to drown other sounds about him. The aide-de-camp, his dark eyes glowing and riveted on those of the fair face so near him, seemed deaf to everything but his own eloquence. But the Indian had placed one hand on his young officer's wrist, and with the other stood pointing at some object coiled under-

neath Lilian's chair, not half an arm's length from the little foot that dangled in its silken stocking but a hand's-breadth from the floor. At that moment Willett bent impressively, still nearer, and instinctively Lilian moved a hand as though about to edge farther away. It was at this very instant that Harris spoke, his voice, absolutely calm, even to the semblance of a drawl, but every word told clear, distinct, and, in spite of its courtesy, commanding, compelling.

"Miss Archer and—ah—Willett, be good enough to sit perfectly still a moment. Don't—move—a muscle!"

Even the general, for a wonder, had ceased—for breath, perhaps—and sat speechless and startled, for noiseless and stealthy as a cat, with long strides, 'Tonio had skirted the edge of the veranda, and with agile spring was at the back of Lilian's chair. There he swooped instantly. There was sound of strident, rasping sk-r-r-r-rr: then a lightning snap, as of a whip. Something black and writhing went flying into the sand, and then squirming blindly away, and 'Tonio straightened to his full height, and without a word strode from the veranda.

"In God's name, what was that?" cried the general, springing from his chair and hastening to his daughter's side.

"Nothing but a snake, sir," said Harris quietly, strolling toward them. "*That* one's done for, anyhow!"

CHAPTER IV

An hour later the lights were out among the barracks, and the silence of the summerlike winter's night had settled on the garrison. Over at the Mess and office buildings all was darkness. Along the log and adobe façade of the officers' quarters, from occasional open doorways the gleam of lantern was thrown across the wooden verandas. The moonbeams flooded the sandy parade and the rough-hewn roofs and walls with tender, silvery radiance that put to shame the twinkling lights, down at the store on the lower flats, and the bleary eye of the big, triangular, glass-faced, iron-bound cresset at the log guard-house, perched at the edge of the mesa. Afar off, through dim vistas of the valley, the silver ribbon of the stream wound and twisted among the willows, but the heights, as a rule, were wrapped in the shadows of their own pines. A game of goodly proportion was going on down at the card room, a brace of ranchmen and prospectors, a venturesome "sub" and the "contract doctor" making up the party, but the general, his household and near neighbors had retired or were retiring for the night. Only the guard and the "owls" were "on deck." Army folk in those days and regions had a way of turning out at dawn for the cool of the morning, turning in at taps for the needed six hours' beauty sleep, lunching lightly at noon, snoozing drowsily

an hour or two, then after tub and fresh linen, venturing forth, those who had to, for the afternoon duties. All social enjoyment, as a rule, began when the sun could not see, but had dropped back of the screen of the mountains.

But there was still faint stir at the camp of the scouts, out beyond the corrals. Rations had been drawn at tattoo, and a limited portion issued to the lithe, swarthy fellows, squatted in semicircle in front of their chief, patiently awaiting their share, no man of their number opening so much as the end of a package, either of cartridge or cracker, until the last had his dole and all were served. It was known that before dawn they were again to set forth, whither, not even 'Tonio had been told, and 'Tonio had noted and felt it. Hitherto there had been counsel between his young commander and himself. This night there had been none. Instead, only half an hour after the exciting episode at the commanding officer's and the despatching of the intruding rattler, 'Tonio had been summoned to the adjutant's office and then questioned by Lieutenant Willett, with *cargador* Muñoz, not Lieutenant Harris, serving as interpreter. Hitherto 'Tonio had conducted his conference with the Great Father's captains with Lieutenant Harris translating. It was significant both to that officer and to 'Tonio that this time a pack train employé had been selected, his name having been suggested at head-quarters at Prescott, and an orderly sent for him early by way of caution, for Muñoz loved monte and mescal. Another significant thing was that Harris had declined an invitation to be present at 'Tonio's examina-

tion. "If Mr. Willett has any question to ask me," he said, "he'll find me at Dr. Bentley's," whither, indeed, he had repaired, as it were, awaiting summons.

Moreover, it was patent to Stannard and Turner and Dr. Bentley, too, that Harris took it much amiss that Willett should at last disclose the fact that he was there to "investigate." He had said nothing of it the night before. He had put up at the adjutant's, after quite a long session at the Mess, an affair attended by Harris only an hour or so, and even then only as an absorbed listener, with other fellow-soldiers, to Willett's brilliant description of the recent campaign in the lava beds, culminating as it had in the brutal massacre by the Modocs of their would-be best friends, the peace commissioners, and General Canby. After taps, however, despite his long and dusty buckboard ride, Willett saw fit to "sit in" to the game almost always in progress down at the trader's store. Whereupon Stannard, Turner and Harris, non-participants ever, took themselves off to bed. It was not much of a game, said Strong, who was there, only Willett, Craney, Watson, Briggs and himself, and was remarkable for only one fact, that Case, the bookkeeper, who never before had seemed to care to play, had happened in late, looked curiously on a moment, and then, without having been presented to Willett, seemed desirous of taking a hand. Craney wondered if Case had been drinking again, but Willett took no notice. Willett was feeling very jolly, said Strong, and it was quite late when they finally quit.

Harris was up with the sun looking over his pack

train and observing 'Tonio and his fellows. Willett did not turn out until office hours, when he had a conference with General Archer, ending in his expressing a wish to "look about" him for the day. He had asked no questions of Harris; had met him heartily, as classmates should, but with just a suspicion of superiority of manner that Harris could not like, and without a word of appreciation of the capital soldier work Harris had been doing.

There was another reason why Harris resented Willett's investigating his scout that second evening. A total abstainer himself from boyhood, reared by a careful mother and aware for many a year that his father's occasional lapses were her perennial dread, Harris had set his canon against the practice from the day he doffed the gray at West Point, and never swerved from his creed after donning the blue. Not so with Willett. Not so with nine-tenths of his associates. Harris had seen, without remark, that Willett enjoyed the occasional beverages mixed for him at the Mess in the late afternoon, and again had noted that his comrade did quite his share this second evening toward finishing the doctor's sherry, though it was the "Old Man," after all, who "got away with" most of the Bordeaux. Twice after dinner Archer had ushered his guests within doors, once to try what was left of the claret, and later, after the snake episode, when some nerves might be in need of bracing, to sample some phenomenal Monongahela. Then when Harris was through, after saying good-night, he was presently followed by Willett, flushed in face and abrupt in manner. Miss Archer had been

spirited off by her mother, and presumably gone to bed. She'd get used to snakes if she stayed long in Arizona, said Willett. What was the sense in scaring her, anyway? Why hadn't Harris quietly given him the tip? *He* could have snapped Mr. Rattler's head off without anybody being the wiser, and Harris saw that the night-caps, taken on top of all that preceded, had tangled Willett's ideas, despite which fact Willett now announced that he had summoned the interpreter and desired Harris to send 'Tonio to the office for investigation at once.

And Willett represented the commanding general, who knew nothing of what was going on, and Harris could only obey.

It was a dramatic scene as it opened. Willett had not failed to hand a copy of his instructions to the post commander and had left entirely to his judgment the question as to whether the officers should be present. Archer had decided against it. 'Tonio might be alarmed. It were better, he said, that no one except the post adjutant, the interpreter, and Lieutenants Willett and Harris appear, and then Harris, whose letter from the field announcing the ill success of the scout was the original cause of the investigation, said he preferred to be excused. Harris did not wish to appear to 'Tonio in the light of an accuser, and Willett was secretly better content that his classmate should stay away.

Down in the bottom of his heart Willett felt that four years of such experiences as Harris had encountered made him a far better judge of Apache methods and motives than he, Willett, could expect to be. Moreover, he

knew well that, were he in Harris's place, he should resent it that an officer no higher in grade, and inferior in Arizona craft, should be sent to inquire into the conduct of his scout. It was just one of those things a tactless chief of staff would sometimes do; but, even though Willett appreciated, none the less did he welcome the order. It put him at once in position of ascendency over a classmate of whose record and success he was both jealous and afraid. If he had felt this earlier in the day the feeling was intensified now, for though he had seemed to some of the officers, to Archer and his family, especially to Lilian, far the more accomplished and attractive of the two, the entrance of that disturbing rattler on the scene had destroyed the equilibrium of affairs. Willett had had no experience with the venomous little reptile, Harris had had much, and Harris's utter *sang froid,* and cool, commanding words had averted what might have been a tragedy. One start, one sudden move of the girl at that critical moment might well have been fatal. The snake, alarmed and angered by previous stir and by Willett's approaches, was actually coiled for the spring. The tiny fangs would have fastened in a flash on that slender, unprotected ankle, and the rest could only be conjectured.

And so, it was in no judicial mood that Willett began his questioning. Accustomed as he was to the hang-dog, dissolute specimens of degenerate red men he had seen in the Columbia country and the lava beds, he hardly knew what to make of 'Tonio, this ascetic of the mountains, clear eyed, trained to a fineness almost unhuman,

all wire and sinew, an Indian withal who looked him straight and fearless in the eye, and held himself as proudly as ever did chieftain of the Aztecs or the Sioux. Summoned from the camp fire to this unsought council, finding himself confronted by strangers, missing his own friend and commander, and instinctively scenting accusation, 'Tonio stood and faced his judges without so much as a tremor.

For a moment Willett sat and studied him. "Siwashes" of Puget's Sound, Klickatats of the Columbia, and scowling, beetle-browed Modocs of upper Nevada he had often met, and their shifting eyes dropped before the keen gaze of the dominant soldier, but this son of the Sierras never so much as suffered the twitch of a muscle, the droop of an eyelash. In the language of the "greaser" cargador, whose border vernacular had suffered through long contact with that of the gringo, "'Tonio didn't scare worth a damn, even when the lieutenant tried bulldozing," but that may merely have been the expression of civilian jealousy of military methods. Being in the pay and under the protection of the United States, 'Tonio could be called on for explanation at any time, only—there were two ways of calling.

"Tell him," said Willett, "the chief-of-chiefs believes the Apache Mohaves are hiding in the Mogollon, —many of them—bucks, squaws and children, and he was sent to find them and to bring them to the reservation. Why did he fail?"

Muñoz, as nearly as he could, put the question, but none too confidently.

"Because my people were driven beyond sound of 'Tonio's voice," was the calm reply, the eyes for the officer, the words for the man, and Muñoz again translated.

"How so? Was not word sent them by Arahawa?"

"Arahawa said the white brother would come with food and presents to lead them home. What they saw was guns and scouts and soldiers. Therefore, they were afraid and fled. Soldiers with guns catch no Mohaves who fear. Therefore was it useless, and I tired."

"Could *you* have caught them and persuaded them had you gone alone?" And Willett asked as he had been instructed at headquarters.

"Caught? Yes! Persuaded? No! They say white soldiers killed Comes Flying, brother to Chief Lone Pine."

"How does he know Comes Flying was killed? We heard it only the night I reached Prescott. No one has told it—here." And now the officer's eyes were glittering. The adjutant shifted uneasily in his chair. This was news to him. Comes Flying stood second only to Lone Pine in the tribe, yet Camp Almy had not heard it. 'Tonio had told it not even to Harris.

"The mountain eagle is 'Tonio's friend; the bear, the lynx, the birds are his brothers."

"Then you *knew* the Apache Mohaves were in the Verde Valley—and in Dead Man's Cañon as late as last week—that they had raided Stoner's Ranch?"

"They were not there, nor did they raid Stoner's Ranch! My people stayed not even on the East Fork. They fled deep in the Mogollon."

Willett gave vent to impatient "Pish!" The Indians he had known all lied, of course, but looked it. This man looked him full in the face, even as he lied, and looked the truth.

"I'll show you why we know you lie," said he impulsively, but the adjutant held up a warning hand, saying, "Listen!"

Through the open doorway, barred against unauthorized intruder by the single soldier, standing beyond earshot upon the level of the parade, there came the prolonged cry of a sentry at the upper end of the garrison. Number Three had repeated, but Number Four was impatient, imperative, and the yell came again: "Corporal of the Guard, Number Four!"

"That *means* something," said the adjutant, springing to his feet. "I'll be back in a minute if it doesn't," and away he went, swift-speeding under the flagstaff, and Muñoz followed straight to the base of the staff, where the trumpeter of the guard and three or four men from the barracks were already gathered, their own surreptitious, blanket-shrouded game for the moment forgotten. They were staring through the moonlight straight away to the northeastward chain of heights, rocky and precipitous, that spanned the valley in that direction, and suddenly two of them gave tongue:

"There it is again! Didn't I tell you?"

Far away among the pines at the crest a tiny blaze shot into the skies, brilliant even in the moonshine. "Signal fire, sure!" said three voices at once. "Signal fire, sure!" echoed other voices, as more men came running forth from the barracks to join the watchers

on the parade. "Signal fire, sure, and right up over the Bennett Ranch—where the general was to-day!"

"My God, I wonder have they jumped it! Yonder comes the corporal—back—running!"

Back, indeed, and running and straight for the doctor's, where he could be heard banging at the open door. So away went the trumpeter, full tilt for tidings, and others, impatient, followed. Instead of coming back the trumpeter kept on, running still harder toward the brow of the hill and the post of Number Four. It was the corporal who called to his halting and anxious fellows:

"It's Bennett's Ranch! His dago's in with the news —mos' dead down there on Number Four; says they've killed the whole family—'Patchie Mohaves!"

There was awed silence one moment. Then a deep voice broke it, and all eyes turned on the speaker. 'Tonio.

"Apache Mohave? No! *No!!*"

CHAPTER V.

BENNETT'S "dago," when halted by Number Four, was as limp a specimen of humanity as that drowsy young trooper had seen in all his soldier days. Bennett's dago was no stranger to the post, having occasionally come thither on errands for his employer, and semi-occasionally appeared without such semblance of authority, but, whether his mission was for master or man, it had never hitherto failed to lead to the store and monte. Small as was the garrison, and few as were the neighboring ranches, there was generally business enough to support two card rooms, one for officers and the "*gente fino*"—the trader, his partner, the chief packer, forage master, and an occasional rancher or prospector; the other, a big one, and often a riotous, for the soldiery, scouts, packers and riffraff of the frontier, and for this establishment Bennett's dago had an indescribable fascination. Here he had met and differed with Muñoz, the two coming to a knife duel, promptly suppressed by the gun butts of the guard. None the less was Muñoz called into requisition as interpreter, for between peril, exhaustion and defective English the "dago" could only splutter an unintelligible jargon that might have been Sicilian, Maltese, or Calabrian, but could not be Spanish. Bennett, it seems, had picked him up for dead on the Verde road, early in the spring

of the year, and Mrs. Bennett had nursed the poor devil back to life. Then it turned out that he knew how to cook. Later it transpired that he had been with a Mexican "outfit," prospecting for gold; had taken mountain fever, become a burden to them, and was left to look out for himself at a tank in Dead Man's Cañon. He paid for his keep in cooking and chores, said Bennett, and picked up enough English to enable him to get along about the ranch. He presently showed desire to care for the horses and mules and to ride them, and one day he disappeared with Bennett's best saddle mule and was gone forty-eight hours, and on his return gravely tendered Bennett a five-dollar gold piece in payment for his time and mule while away. He said he won it at monte, and it was proved that he had found his way to the card room, as a mule does to water, and, without knowledge of English, displayed consummate skill in the game; had played only two hours, had won twenty dollars and departed at dusk. But his winnings were in greenbacks and silver. Whence had come the gold? The trader's people said he stabled his mule; introduced himself as "Bennett's *mozo*—me," and "sat into" the game then in progress as though long accustomed; showing silver, mainly Mexican, the only credentials the players required. At sunset he quit, easy winner, and went without taking so much as a "snifter." Once having found the way, and the means, the dago came again and yet again, neither giving nor having trouble until he ran foul of Muñoz, the Mexican, whom he seemed to hate at sight. Whatever his lingo, or that employed by the polyglot Mexican, they under-

stood each other, and the misunderstanding that followed was purely personal.

Now, in spite of his craze for gambling the dago had points that appealed to Bennett. He found him valuable in many a way. He was almost doglike in his devotion to Bennett's wife and children. He was a "bang-up" cook, barring a heavy hand at first with *chile* and onions. He patched up an old guitar of Mrs. Bennett's and strummed delightfully all manner of strange Mexican and Mediterranean melodies, and, encouraged by her, had even been betrayed into song. He was kind to the stock, and the mules took to him from the very start, which the two horses did not do. The dogs tolerated at first and then "tied" to him. So, too, the cat adored him. He got along smoothly with the one negro and two Maricopa Indian boys Bennett had brought with him from the Gila. He did not drink even when at the post, and in the course of six months had come to be a feature, almost a fixture of the ranch, yet "Dago" was the only name by which he was known, even among his benefactors. Bennett said he believed he had forgotten he ever had another.

That very morning, showing all his white teeth, he had whipped off a battered old hat of Mexican straw at sight of the general and his fair daughter, had taken the basket while the orderly led the horses to the corral, had followed them about the little garden patch while Mrs. Bennett delightedly showed her lettuce and spinach and the gorgeous bed of poppies. Then he had brewed delicious chocolate, though condensed milk was poor substitute for whipped cream, and had prepared

such an appetizing little luncheon, and had made himself so useful, that the general was moved to say to Bennett that any time the dago tired of his job he could find one at the fort. "I wonder he stays," said Bennett. "I only give him five dollars a month, even now, and he could get twenty, and unlimited monte, at the store; besides, he is mortal 'fraid of these 'Patchie Mohaves; hell knows why, and hides when he sees 'em coming."

"Do they never bother you stealing or—some way?" asked the general, with an anxious glance at the two sturdy little ranchers, five and three-year-old Bennetts, rolling and wrestling in the sand, showing off for the benefit of the visitors.

"'Patchie Mohaves?" asked Bennett, looking up in surprise. "Never have! You know I drove mule team to the agency two years ago, and sort of grew to them. Why, Minnie, now, thinks as much of them, or most, as she does of the boys at the post. They're a sort of police, sir. The Tontos don't dare come down so long as the Mohaves are about here."

"I know," said the general reflectively. "Yet some few bucks drifted off to the Tontos, and the agent's been raising a row because so many of them roost down here instead of staying on the reservation, bringing in game. Did you know that two bands were out—women and all—without permits, and that was one thing that brought Lieutenant Harris and his scouts up here?"

"Well, that accounts for our having seen none of them for over two weeks. They must have gone clean out to the Mesa. General," he continued anxiously,

" they don't like their agent, or that agency. They're herded in there with Apache Yumas and sick Tontos and Sierra Blancas—fellows that get better treatment because they're bigger devils and raise merry hell. *I* know 'em and the agent don't. I'd move in to the post if *they* were out, but we're safe with the 'Patchie Mohaves."

That was what poor Bennett was saying not twelve hours earlier, and now the homelike ranch had gone up in flames, and Bennett, wailed the dago, lay butchered among the ruins. So, too, the negro. The Maricopa boys had fled only, probably, to be run down and killed, but what had become of the poor, helpless little wife and mother, with her bonny, blue-eyed boys, God alone knew.

By this time half the enlisted strength of the post was up and out and flocking to hear the tidings. Bentley, the surgeon, had shuffled over in his slippered feet and was giving Dago first aid to the demoralized in the shape of *aguardiente Americano,* that made him sputter and sneeze, but speedily braced him. The adjutant hurried over to call the commanding officer, passing Harris on the way, and Harris, already in campaign dress, was hastening to the camp of his scouts. Turner, silent and sombre, as was his wont, had elbowed his way through the throng and stood glowering at Dago and the beetled-browed Muñoz, as though weighing them in mental balance, and finding both wanting. Mrs. Stannard, through the blinds, had hailed the adjutant as he went bounding by to say the captain would be out in a moment. Already Wettstein had told them the fearful news. The

adjutant stepped inside the open hallway at the general's and banged on the swinging door of the little front room, answered almost instantly by the subdued and gentle voice of Mrs. Archer from the head of the stairs. The general was sound asleep. Was it necessary to wake him?

Strong expected as much. Not once a month did that genial veteran permit himself an over-indulgence, but, when he did, the quicker he slept it off the better. He had taken his night-cap and turned in betimes, so as to be up at reveille. But Strong knew what the "Old Man" would say to him later if he failed to rouse him now. "It's immediate, Mrs. Archer," said he. "We have bad news from Bennett's Ranch."

A pale, frightened, white little face had come peering over the motherly shoulder at the moment, even whiter in the flickering light of Mrs. Archer's candle, and at sound of the name there went up a low cry of distress.

"Oh, Mr. Strong, is it Mrs. Bennett—or the boys?"

"We don't—know—yet, Miss Archer. The dago's here, scared to death; galloped all the way with a story of an Indian raid. I'm hoping it isn't as bad as he thinks. God forgive me the lie," he added under his breath.

"But they haven't hurt *her?* They surely would not hurt *her!*" came the piteous wail, as the girl clung to the rude balustrade, while her mother hastened to rouse the sleeping warrior. "Heaven pity her," thought Strong, "unless they have killed her outright and *not* carried her away."

Then came a step in the hall behind him, and Wil-

lett was there, alert and resourceful. "Pray don't be troubled *yet,* Miss Archer," he called reassuringly, and barely noticing Strong. "The messenger's been stampeded before this, the men tell me. He's too badly scared to know the truth. It may be there's been a fire. I think there has, for the light could be seen, and so he imagined Indians and never stopped to see. I'm going right up there and will send back word. *Please* don't worry yet!"

How thoughtful he was for her, and for dear mamma! How kind! Strong knew full well that the light they had seen was the glare of no burning ranch, but a beacon far up in the hills—a signal fire, of course. The ranch lay in a deep valley ten miles to the north-east, with high ridges intervening. In the brilliant moonlight a glare that might otherwise have been seen on the sky would pass unnoted. Strong knew, deep down in his heart, that whatever the fate of the family, the ranch was a thing of the past, but Willett's words were soothing. It was better to let them go unquestioned.

Then out came the general on the landing above, his towzled gray poll poking over the rail. "What is it, Strong?" I'll be down quick as I can half dress." Indeed, he was losing no instant of time, though it cost him some items of toilet. With his feet in "flip-flaps," his legs in loose linen trousers, and buttoning a sack coat over his nightgown, the veteran was already shuffling downstairs. "Run back to your room, dear," he said, as he passed his little girl. "You shall know everything presently," and then in a moment was out in the free air of heaven, the two young officers with him.

Briefly, cautiously, the adjutant murmured the dago's story, adding his fear as to its truth. Blankly Archer looked at them an instant, aghast, appalled, as well he might be, and for the moment unable or unwilling to trust himself to speak. There had been no time, he said, to souse his head in the big basin of cool water his wife would have given him. He was still heated, flushed, suddenly roused from heavy slumber, and by no means at his best. Strong knew just how to act in the premises and would have given him time to recover, but there was Willett, alert and insistent,—Willett who represented the commanding general, and whose words carried weight—Willett who was quick to seize the opportunity and to say:

"This is just in line with what we thought at headquarters, sir, and the quicker I can get to the spot the better. With your consent, general, I'll push out at once with the scouts, and we'll get back word to you before daylight."

And even Strong, loyal soul, had to admit later that the general's answer was practically "Yes, yes, by all means, Willett, and I'll send a troop in support," whereupon Willett darted away to the adjutant's quarters to doff his natty uniform and don something older and more suitable. Twenty minutes thereafter he had swung a leg over one of Stannard's troop horses and spurred away down to the north-eastward slope, toward the upper ford of the stream, where dimly in the distance another horseman could be seen, with a dozen shadowy, ghost-like forms gliding along in tireless jog trot in line with him—Harris and his mountain hounds, the Apache

scouts, already *en route* for the scene of disaster. Bentley, Stannard and Turner, standing at the edge of the bluff, with fourscore soldiers clustered about them, while others had gone with Dago to hear again his tale, gazed thoughtfully after the disappearing shadows and then at each other.

"Humph!" said Stannard, in words meant for his fellows, but in tones that went farther. "There'll be conflict of authority now or *I'm* a duffer!"

Ten minutes they stood and watched; then came the orderly with the general's compliments, and he'd be glad to see Captain Stannard at once.

"That means you're going, Stan," said the surgeon. "I suppose he'll send my assistant with you."

They found the commanding officer on the porch of his quarters, very grave and quiet now, perfectly calm and self-possessed. The dago had squatted at the edge of the steps, his face bowed in his hands, shivering as though from cold. Muñoz slouched near by, eying him in aggressive contempt. Several sergeants, with many of the men, were grouped at respectful distance, eager and waiting the word. Strong was with the ladies, for Mrs. Stannard had dressed hurriedly and come over, and between them the two elders were gently striving to console or encourage Lilian, who had been quite overcome by the particulars as translated by Muñoz. The dago claimed that from his pallet, under the "linter" of the corral, he had been roused by the sudden yell at the ranch, followed by swift shooting, screams and cries of Mrs. Bennett and the children, the outburst of flame, and then he saw them, the Indians, coming for him,

and he sprang on the best horse and lashed him all the way to the post.

Stannard came at the moment, solid, stocky, and reliable—a man it was a comfort to look at in moments of peril or excitement, and such moments were frequent in the old days of the frontier. Silently he saluted, stood before the commander and received his brief orders—mount the troop, follow the scouts, and if it should appear that Mrs. Bennett and the children had been carried off by the Indians, to pursue and do his best to recapture. Rations would follow by mule train.

Stannard had just one question to ask.

"Shall I call on Mr. Harris or Mr. Willett for scouts, sir?" And even then it was noted that he named Harris first.

"Why—on Mr. Harris. He is in command."

"Very good, sir," said Stannard, and turned on his heel. Mrs. Stannard, hastily kissing Lilian's pale and tear-wet cheek, started to follow, but through the little knots of soldiery a strange figure came forcing a way, a lithe Apache on resentful mule—'Tonio, already back from the front, a little folded paper in his hand. Lashing the obstinate brute he bestrode, 'Tonio dove straight at the general, and all men waited to learn the tidings. Hastily Archer opened the paper, glanced it over in the moonlight, looked up, and nodded to Stannard.

"Willett says from round the point they can see two more signal fires toward the north-east, just the way to the Apache Mohaves!"

Then came a dramatic incident. Sitting his saddle mule like a chief of the Sioux, 'Tonio straightened to

his full height, his strong face gleaming in the brilliant, silvery sheen, his bare right arm, with clinching fist uplifted, and in a voice that rang out like a clarion on the hushed and breathless night, shouted his response for his people:

"Apache Mohave! No! *No!* No!"

CHAPTER VI.

Barely a mile away to the north-east of the site of old Camp Almy a ridge of rock and shale stretches down from the foothills of the Black Mesa and shuts off all view of the rugged, and ofttimes jagged, landscape beyond—all save the peaks and precipitous cliffs of the Mogollon, and some of the pine-crested heights that hem the East Fork. Time was, toward the fag end of the Civil War, when the volunteers from the "Coast" kept a lookout on the point, a practice that yielded more scalps to the Indians than security to the inmates. The system, therefore, fell into disuse, and the post became unpopular because of the mutilated condition in which the pickets were twice found by the relief, and the amount of reliable information received from the point never quite paid for the cost. With the disappearance of the Tontos, who were not such fools as their Spanish name implied, the practice of stationing outlying sentries was dropped. The Tontos seemed to have abandoned the valley to their distant cousins, the Apache-Mohaves, whose presence there, in small, itinerant parties, was objected to less by the few scattered settlers than by the one badgered agent at the distant reservation.

This, at least, was the case at first. Bennett and Sowerby, from above Camp Almy, and two others from

below, found them friendly and peaceable. But presently complaints were heard from settlers over at McDowell, in the Verde Valley to the west, and other settlers away up the Verde toward Camp Sandy. Then Sowerby swore his stock was run off, and Bennett presently remained the only ranchman to stand up for them. The agent declared them contumacious and tricky. Other whites—Arizona white was then a reddish-brown—added their evil word to the official's. It was the old adage over again: "Give a dog a bad name," etc., and the department commander had sent for scouts to coax them in, before despatching troops to enforce their coming, and Harris had found nobody—nothing but abandoned *rancherias* and unsavory relics.

And then had come the tidings of a clash—the killing of Comes Flying, son of a chief, and brother to a tribal leader, and then in reprisal, probably, the burning of Bennett's home and the butchery of Bennett. Then Harris had stayed not a moment, but, acting on the understanding of the previous evening, had gone forth at once.

It is well to be prompt, yet oftentimes wise to be prompted. Post commanders like to be able to say in their reports, "I ordered" this, or "By my direction" that, and Harris had gone at the word of alarm without other word with the general.

That Harris was to choose his own time was the understanding between them when they parted, almost affectingly, at night, for between the snake episode and the successive toddies the good old gentleman was quite effusive. There would have been, probably, no change

in the instructions had Harris started at reveille or even at dawn. But to "pull out" at midnight, with the situation changed and without another word with the commander, was something open to criticism. Moreover, Harris knew it.

But he had two reasons, neither of which might count with a court of his peers, but were of mighty account to him. 'Tonio had come to him actually ablaze with indignation. 'Tonio had said his people were accused when his people were innocent. 'Tonio had begged that they start at once, and he would show it was not Apache-Mohaves at fault. He would show who were the real raiders, and might even rescue the prisoners. So Harris never hesitated. Leaving a brief note in the hands of Dr. Bentley, he had ridden away with 'Tonio and a dozen of his best, only to be overtaken a mile or so out by the man of all others he least desired to see. Hal Willett was the second reason Harris had for wishing to get well away. If ever there came opportunity for a man to step in, and upon, another man's plans and purposes, Harold Willett could be relied upon to take it. Harris knew him of old, knew instinctively that, if a possible thing, his classmate, ever selfish and self-seeking, would rob him of the fruits of his long service with the scouts, and would not scruple in such an emergency to take over the command.

Harris was right. Just as the leaders rounded the huge shoulder of hillside jutting so boldly to the bank of the stream, and were eagerly pointing to the two distant flames far up in the foothills, Willett came galloping to his side. "Signal fires, of course!" said he. "It's

just as I said, and this fellow of yours denied. They're making for the Mesa. I'll send back word at once." With that he set to scribbling a note on a page of his scouting book, then again galloped forward, catching Harris and 'Tonio riding side by side.

"Tell 'Tonio to take this straight to General Archer," said he.

Then Harris turned on him:

"I don't recognize your right to order my scouts about, Willett. I need 'Tonio here."

"You'll have him again in twenty minutes," was the conciliatory answer. "This is by Archer's own order, Harris. I've come straight from his side. Otherwise I'll interfere with you as little as possible."

And Harris, with one look of distrust in his comrade's flushing face, turned quietly to 'Tonio, said barely ten words to his second, not one to his senior, then bitterly spurred ahead.

He was not the first man in the profession of arms to realize what it is to faithfully and persistently labor to develop, instruct and discipline a body of men until he and they are working in absolute accord, all the intricate parts of the human machine nicely adjusted and moving without the faintest friction, and then to find himself at the eleventh hour set to one side, a stranger to his men and a rival to himself set in his stead, and be bidden to move on as a sort of martial second fiddle, while the credit and reward go to the new first violin. Nor was Harris the last by any manner of means. As General Archer had himself been heard to say, "One essential of military preferment is a knowledge of the

game of euchre—your neighbor." Couple this with utter indifference to the rights of fellow-soldiers, and a catlike capacity to work by stealth in the dark, and there is no starry altitude to which one may not aspire. Harris made the same mistake older soldiers had sometimes made in higher commands, that of sticking to their own men, and duties, without keeping an eye on, and a friend at, headquarters. Anomalous as it may sound, the absent are ever wrong, even when "present for duty," where they should be. If Harris that night had only gone to headquarters instead of his camp; had stopped to see the general instead of starting promptly to the rescue, there would have been less to tell by way of a story.

Possibly a realization of this had already come over him, as angering yet unswerving, he once again overtook the eager leaders among his scouts,—lean, wiry fellows, ever gliding swiftly on in that tireless Apache running walk. Once there again, he kept his broncho at the trot to hold his own, and a broncho trot, after a mile or two of warming up, becomes something besides monotonous. Away to the far front, the north-east, flickered the tiny blazes; guiding lights, as Willett would have it; bale fires, as Harris began to believe—fires set by confederates to blind the eye of the pursuit, or lure pursuers to a trap. Away to the far front, seven miles now, and deep in a nook of the foothills, lay the site of Bennett's ruined ranch, and thither, at top speed of his scouts, was the young leader pressing. Not even a dull glow in the heavens above, or a spark on the earth beneath, could the sharp-eyed scouts discover to tell of its

lonely fate. Only the dago's horrified words, only the confirmative symptoms of these farther fires, had these fly-by-night rescuers to warrant their mission. The story had its probable side. Peaceable as had been the Apache-Mohaves, the fact that a clash had occurred between them and some of the agent's forces,—a clash in which Comes Flying had been killed,—might readily turn the scale and send them on the warpath. If so, the first and nearest whites were apt to be the victims. If so, Bennett and his beloved wife and boys might well have been murdered in their beds—or spared for a harsher fate. In any event, the first duty—the obvious one—for Harris and his scouts was to reach the spot with all speed; ascertain, if possible, the fate of the ranch folk, then act as their discoveries might direct. All this Harris was turning over in mind as he hurried ahead. The road, though little worn, was distinct, and now that they were out of the bottom and skirting the stony bed of a little mountain stream, quite firm and dry. Six miles an hour, easily, his swarthy, half-naked fellows were making without ever "turning a hair." His own lean broncho, long trained to such work, scrambled along in that odd, short-legged trot, and Harris himself, trained to perfection, hard and dry, all sinewy strength, rode easily along—he could have done almost as well afoot—at the head of his men, keeping them to their pace, yet never overdriving.

But with Willett the case was different. For him there had been no hard and dry scouting. It had been wet work in the Columbia country. It had been "hunt-your-hole business" in the lava beds, where the hat that

showed above the rocks was sure to get punctured. Then the month of feasting in that most lavish of cities, "'Frisco, the Golden," and the fortnight's voyage by sea, with further symposiums, and finally some hours of frontier hospitality at Prescott and at Almy, all had combined to spoil his condition, and before he had ridden forty minutes Hal Willett found himself blown and shaken. He lagged behind to regain breath, then galloped forward to lose it. He knew that Harris had left him in anger and indignation not unjustifiable. He knew he had not full warrant for his authority. He knew Harris was entitled to unhampered command, and that he had hampered. Yet, now, believing that Harris was pushing swiftly ahead as much to "shake" him as to reach the scene, he again dug spurs to his laboring troop horse, and came sputtering over the loose stones to the young leader's side.

"Harris," he puffed, "this is no way to work your men. They'll be blown when you get there, and of no earthly use."

"You don't know them," answered Harris, with exasperating calm, and without so much as a symptom of slowing up.

"But—I know how it affects—me,—and I'm no novice at scouting."

"You are to—this sort of thing, anyhow," was the uncompromising answer, and then with a cool, comprehensive glance that seemed to take in the entire man, he added, "You're out of training, Willett—the one thing a man has to watch out for in Apache work. Bet-

ter let me leave a couple of men with you, and come on easily. You won't be very far behind us."

And then, as bad luck would have it, 'Tonio came cantering up from the rear, his big, lop-eared mule protesting to the last, and 'Tonio bore a little folded paper.

He was not versed in cavalry etiquette, this chieftain of the frontier, nor had he learned to read writing as he did men. The two officers at the moment were side by side, Willett on the right, his charger plunging and sweating with back set ears and distended nostrils; Harris on the left, his broncho jogging steadily, sturdily on, showing no symptom of weariness. "To Gran Capitan—Willett" were the general's words, it seems, when he sent 'Tonio on his way with the note, but in 'Tonio's eyes Harris was "Gran Capitan," even though hailed at times as "*Capitan Chiquito,*" and to Harris's left 'Tonio urged his mount and silently held forth the missive.

There was never any question thereafter that it was meant for the other. Archer had his reasons. Willett was there as the aid, the representative, of the department commander, charged with an important duty. Willett had come to him, volunteered to go with the scouts, and he had bidden him God speed. Willett was the senior in rank as first lieutenant, promotions in the "Lost and Strayed" having been livelier than in the "Light Dragoons." Moreover, Willett had shown proper deference to him, the post commander, whereas, Harris, said he, in his first impulsive, self-excusing mood, even though warranted in going, had gone without a word. Sensitive and proud, the veteran of many

fights and many sorrows, ruefully bethinking himself of Harris's abstinence and his own conviviality, saw fit to imagine Harris guilty of an intentional slight.

Like noble old Newcombe, the gentlest and humblest-minded of men, "he was furious if anybody took a liberty with him," and in his sudden rousing and wrath this was what he thought Harris had done. It was to humble him rather than to exalt Willett that he ignored the one and hailed the other. "To Gran Capitan Willett," he said, and 'Tonio handed the missive to the one "gran capitan" he knew and served and loved.

And Harris, never noting the pencil scrawl upon the back, proceeded to tear it open, when Willett stretched forth his hand:

"I think you will find that is for me, Harris—an answer to what I wrote," and his words had the distinct ring of authority. Harris flushed, even in the moonlight; turned it over, read the unsteady characters, "Lieutenant Willett, A. D. C.," surrendered it without a word, and a second time drove ahead, while Willett reined up to read.

It was ten minutes before Willett again overtook the pale-faced young officer at the front. Harris's mouth looked like a rigid gash, and his battered felt was pulled down over a deep-lined forehead, as with stern eyes he turned his head, but never his shoulder, in answer to his classmate's imperative call.

"Rein in now, and listen to this. Harris. If you must have it, it's—by order."

And Harris slowly checked his horse; silently inclined an ear.

"Lieutenant Willett, it says," began the senior, with the sweat rolling into his eyes, "Your despatch received. The fires you mention indicate further hostile parties, 'Tonio insists not Mohaves. If not, must be Tontos. Therefore, move with caution. Stannard just saddling. Use your discretion as to waiting for him.

"ARCHER, Commanding Post."

Then Willett turned. He had begun to refold, but ceased, and held it forth. "Read it yourself, if you like." Harris's gauntlet came up in protest. He bit his lip hard, but said no word. The scouts were but white specks in the distance now. There was sudden cry, low, like that of the night-bird, and 'Tonio dug his moccasined heels in his lop-eared charger's ribs and drove out to the front, then turned in saddle, looked back at his chief and pointed. Both officers instantly followed.

The trail led over a low spur, and the scouts had halted and were squatting at the crest. Straightway before them, possibly four miles, a dull red glow lay in the midst of the moonlight, with occasional tongues of lurid flame lazily lapping at some smouldering upright. The fire had spent its force; gorged itself on its prey and was sinking to sleep.

"Come on then!" said Harris, speaking for the first time impetuously. "If you can't stand the pace let us shove ahead!"

"And run slap into ambush? No. My orders are

to move with caution. We've got to *feel* our way now. Hold your hand, Harris—and your men."

Barely fifty minutes had they been in coming these six miles from Almy. Barely fifty minutes thereafter, and with less than three miles more to their credit, halted for cautious reconnaissance, with the ruined ranch still a long mile away, there came sound of feeble hail from a patch of willows down by the brookside, and presently, in fearful plight, they dragged forth Bennett's colored man-of-all-work, unharmed, but half dead with terror. Yes, Indians had suddenly come in the early evening. First warning was from the Maricopa boy who came running from the spring, saying they had killed his brother. Bennett grabbed his gun and ran out to see, telling him, Rusty, to take a rifle and hurry with Mrs. Bennett and the children and hide in the willows down the creek. They heard firing and yelling, and 'twas all Rusty could do, he said, to keep Mrs. Bennett from running back to her husband, and the children from screaming aloud, but he made them go with him still farther down the valley, down to that patch yonder, and there they lay in hiding while the Indians burned the ranch, and seemed hunting everywhere for them, and at last things quieted down, but Mrs. Bennett was wild and crazy and crying to go back and find her husband, dead or alive, and he had to hold her. Just a few minutes ago, not fifteen minutes before, she broke away, and he found it was no use trying. She started to run back, telling him to save her boys. She kissed them both and went, and it wasn't five minutes after that before he heard her

scream awfully, and the boys began to cry again, and then—then he saw two Indians coming running, and he knew they'd got her and were coming for the children, so what could he do but run and save himself?

"Lead on where you left them!" ordered Harris instantly, never waiting for Willett to speak. Ten minutes brought them to the farther shelter, a dense little willow copse, empty and deserted. "Come on to the ranch," was the next order, but there Willett interposed.

"Carefully now. Let your scouts open out and feel the way," he ordered, and Harris would not hear. Harris had thrown himself from his horse to lead the search. He never stopped to remount. He ran like a deer up the stony creek bed until he regained the road, his scouts following pell-mell, and in ten minutes more they found him bending over the lifeless body of brave, sturdy Jack Bennett, weltering in his blood at the side of the spring house, and with no sign of the hapless, helpless wife and mother anywhere.

"By God, Hal Willett!" cried Harris, as he sprang to his feet, all dignity and deliberation thrown to the winds. "You may 'proceed with caution' all you damned please. 'Tonio and I go after that poor woman and her children. We'd have saved them *here* if it hadn't been for you!"

CHAPTER VII.

The dawn was breaking in sickly pallor over the jagged scarp of the Mesa, bounding the chaotic labyrinth of bowlders, crag and cañon beneath. Far up the rugged valley, jutting from the faded fringe of pine, juniper and scrub oak that bearded the Mogollon, a solitary butte stood like sentry against the cloudless sky, its lofty crown of rock just faintly signalling the still distant coming of the heralds of the god of day. Here in the gloomy depths of the basin, and at the banks of the murmuring stream, all was still silence and despond. The smouldering ruins of Bennett's cosey home lay a mass of dull red coal, with smoke wreaths sailing idly aloft from charred beam or roof-tree. The mangled body of the stout frontiersman had been gathered into a trooper's blanket and lay there near the pathetic ruin of the house he had so hopefully builded, so bravely defended, for the wife and little ones. Half a dozen Indian scouts, silent and dejected, were squatting inert about the little garden, irrigated from the main *acequia,* where the heavy-headed poppies, many of them, were still nodding on their stalks, while others lay crushed and trampled. A little distance away down the stream a little troop of cavalry, in most business-like uniform, had dismounted and was watering some fifty thirsty horses, while its stocky commander, his hands thrust

deep in the pockets of his riding breeches, his slouch hat pulled down to his brows, his booted foot kicking viciously at a clump of cactus, was listening impatiently to the words of the young aide-de-camp, who seemed far less at ease than when he trod the boards of the general's quarters some six hours earlier in the night.

"Do I understand you then," and Stannard spoke with a certain asperity, "that Mr. Harris, with just two or three scouts, has gone out hunting on his own hook?—that even 'Tonio isn't with him?"

"He claimed the right to go, and I told him to take half a dozen—half a score of the scouts, if need be, and leave the other half with me, only I drew the line at 'Tonio. I needed him here. He is the only Indian in the lot who understands enough English to catch my meaning and to translate. I could let Harris go, or 'Tonio, separately, but not both together. That left me powerless. Oh, yes, he objected. He said 'Tonio had always been his right bower—always had worked with him and for him. But 'Tonio, not Harris, is the chief of scouts, the man they look to and obey. Now he and most of his followers are here to do your bidding. If Harris had been allowed his way, I'd have been probably alone."

Stannard sniffed. "Which way'd he go?" he bluntly asked.

"I'm not sure. We were going to trail the moment it was light enough to see. One thing is certain, they did not start in the direction of the signals, though they may have veered off that way. 'Tonio is the only one who claims to know anything. 'Tonio says 'Apache

Tonto' was the murderer, not Apache-Mohave, and 'Tonio's in the sulks. Look at him!"

Stannard glanced an instant toward the gaunt figure of the Apache, standing dejectedly apart from all others and gazing fixedly toward the dawn. The light was stronger now. The red was in the orient sky. The distant butte was all aglow with the radiance of the rising yet invisible sun. Stannard seemed more concerned in the whereabouts of Mr. Harris than in the worries of Mr. Willett. Again he returned to his questions.

"Well, did Harris give any inkling of his purpose—whether he meant to follow the trail till he found captives and captors, or only till he found where it probably led to? I've got to act, and lose no time. Sergeant, tell the men to hurry with their coffee," he called, to the brown-eyed, dark-featured soldier who was coming forward at the moment. A salute was the only answer, as the sergeant turned about in his tracks and signalled to the boy trumpeter, holding his own and the captain's horse. Another moment and Stannard was in saddle.

"Harris didn't say," was the guarded answer. "You know, I suppose, that he left the post without consulting the general, and he took it much amiss that, in compliance with the general's orders, I exercised certain authority after reaching him. Now you are here to take entire charge, I turn over the whole business to you. There's what's left of the scouts; there's what's left of the ranch; and there," with a glance at the

blanket-shrouded form, "is what's left of the Bennetts. I'll jog back to the post by and by."

"Oh, then you're not going on with us?" said Stannard, relieved in mind, he hardly knew why.

"No, sir, I only rode out here to investigate and report. We, of course, hoped to save *some*thing."

"Pity you hadn't spared yourself and not spoiled the pie," thought Stannard as he looked about him over the scene of desolation. The men were snapping their tin mugs and the refilled canteens to the saddle rings. The captain rode over to 'Tonio, a kindly light in his blue-gray eyes. He whipped off the right gauntlet and held forth his hand.

"No Apache-Mohave!" said he stoutly. "Apache Tonto. Si! Now catch 'em Teniente Harris." Poor lingo that "pidgin" Indian of the desert and the long ago, but it served its purpose. 'Tonio grasped the proffered hand, a grateful gleam in his black eyes; warned with the other hand the captain's charger from certain tracks he had been jealously guarding; then pointed eagerly, here, there, in half a dozen places, where footprints were still unmarred in the powdery dust. "Si—si—Apache Tonto!" and the long, skinny finger darted, close to the ground, from one print to the other. "No Apache-Mohave! No!"

"Then come! Mount!" called Stannard. "Leave a corporal and four men here as guard until the ambulance gets out from the post," he added, to the first sergeant. "Mount the troop, soon's you're ready. I'm going ahead with 'Tonio and the scouts. *Ugashi,* 'Tonio! Good-by, Mr. Willett. Take one of the men,

if you need an orderly," he shouted back, over a flannel-shirted shoulder, innocent of badge or strap of any kind. In point of dress or equipment there was absolutely no difference between the captain of cavalry and his fifty men.

A moment later, spreading out over the low ground like so many hounds throwing off for a scent, 'Tonio and his scouts were trotting away toward a dip in the rugged heights to the north-east, for thither, the moment it was light enough even faintly to see, the keen eyes of the Apaches had trailed the fugitives, and now with bounding feet they followed the sign, Tonio foremost, his mount discarded. Afoot, like his fellows, and bending low, pointing every now and then to half turned pebble, to broken twig or bruised weed, he drove ever eagerly forward, the stolid bearing of the Indian giving way with each successive minute to unusual, though repressed excitement. Thrice he signalled to Stannard and pointed to the crushed and beaten sand—to toe or heel or sole marks to which the Caucasian would have attached but faint importance had not the aborigine proclaimed rejoicefully "Apache-Mohave!" whereat Stannard shook his head and set his teeth and felt his choler rising.

"Thought you swore Apache *Tonto* awhile ago," said Stannard wrathfully. "Now you're saying Apache *Mohave!*"

"Si! Si! Apache Tonto—kill—shoot. Apache-Mohave good Indian. Look, see, *carry,*" and with hands and arms in eager gesture he strove to illustrate.

Could he mean that they who killed Bennett were

hostile Tontos, and that these who bore the poor widowed creature were of the Mohave blood? If so, why should 'Tonio seem really to rejoice? Had he not strenuously denied that his people took any part in the outrage? Was he not now insisting that they were active in bearing her away—probably to captivity and a fate too horrible? Stannard, riding close at his heels, his men still following in loose skirmish order until they should reach the ravine, studied him with varying emotion. Harris had certainly betrayed a fear that 'Tonio was but half-hearted in the matter of scouting after Apache-Mohaves. Now the suspected scout was trailing for all he was worth, with the pertinacity of the bloodhound.

Broad daylight again, and the sun peering down from the crest of the great Mesa, and the morning growing hot, and some new hands already pulling eagerly at the canteens, despite their older comrades' warning. And still the advance went relentlessly on. They were climbing a rugged, stony ravine now, with bare shoulders of bluff overhanging in places, and presently, from a projecting ledge, Stannard was able to look back over the rude landscape of the lowlands. There to the west, stretching north and south, was the long, pine-crested bulwark of the Mazatzal, the deep, ragged rift of Dead Man's Cañon toward the upper end. Winding away southward, in the midst of the broad valley, the stream shone like burnished silver in the shallow reaches, or sparkled over rocky beds. Far to the south-west, the dull, dun-colored roofs and walls of the post could barely be discerned, even with the powerful binocular,

against the brown barren of the low "bench" whereon it lay. Only the white lance of the flagstaff, and the glint of tin about the chimneys, betrayed its position. From north to far south-east ran the palisade-like crest of the Black Mesa, while the Sierra Ancha bound the basin firmly at the southward side. Deep in the ravines of the foothills, where little torrents frothed and tumbled in the spring tide, scant, thread-like rivulets came trickling now to join the gentle flood of the lower Tonto and the East Fork of the Verde, and, at one or two points along the Mesa, signal smokes were still puffing into the breathless air. Below them, possibly six miles away, yet looking almost within long rifle-shot, the square outline of the abandoned corral, the blackened ruin of the ranch, with the adjacent patches, irrigated, tilled, carefully tended—all Bennett's hard and hopeful toil gone for nothing—told their incontrovertible tale of savage hate and treachery. It was a sorry ending this, a wretched reward for the years of saving, self-denial and steadfast labor of him who had lived so long at amity among these children of the mountain and desert, giving them often of his food and raiment, asking only the right to build up a little lodge in this waste land of the world, where he need owe no man anything, yet have home and comfort and competence for those he loved, and a welcome for the wayfarer who should seek shelter at his door. It was the old, old story of many a pioneer and settler, worn so threadbare at the campfires of the cavalry that rough troopers wondered why it was that white men dared so much to win so little. Yet, through just such hardships, loneliness and

peril our West was won, and they who own it now have little thought for those who gave it them.

Stannard sighed as he closed his signal glass and turned again to the duty in hand. "What's the trouble?" he bluntly asked his faithful sergeant; lieutenants at the moment he had none.

"Check, sir. All rock and half a dozen gullies. Scouts are trying three of them. Don't seem to know which way they went from here. Even a mule shoe makes no print."

The troop, following its leader's example, without sound or signal had dismounted, and stood in long column of files adown the ravine. 'Tonio and his fellow-scouts had disappeared somewhere in the stony labyrinth ahead. Up this way, before the dawn, the dusky band must have led or driven their captives, two of Bennett's mules having been pressed into service. Up this way, not an hour behind them, must have followed Harris and his handful of allies, four Indians in all. Up this way, swift and unerring thus far, 'Tonio, backed by half a dozen half-naked young braves, had guided the cavalry, and never before, so said old Farrier Haney, who had 'listed in the troop at Prescott, and had served here with the previous regiment in '69—never before had he known 'Tonio so excited, so vehement. Beyond all question, 'Tonio's heart was in the chase to-day.

But this delay was most vexatious. Every moment lost to the pursuit was more than a minute gained by the pursued. Lighter by far and trained to mountain climbing, the Apache covers ground with agility almost goatlike. It was long after seven, said Stannard's

Scrambling down the adjacent slope every man for himself.

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watch, and not a glimpse had they caught of Indian other than their own. It was just half past the hour, and Stannard with an impatient snap of the watch-case was about thrusting it back in his pocket, when, far to the front, reëchoing, resounding among the rocks, two shots sounded in quick succession, followed in sudden sputter by half a dozen more. "Turn your horses over to Number Four, men!" shouted Stannard. "Sergeant Schreiber, remain in charge. The rest of you come on."

Scrambling up a rocky hillside, he led on to the divide before him—the crest between two steep ravines—his men coming pell-mell and panting after, every now and then dislodging a stone and sending it clattering to the depths below. Two hundred yards ahead, at a sharp, angular point, one of the Yuma scouts stood frantically waving his hand, and thither Stannard turned his ponderous way. No lightweight he, and the pace and climb began to tell. Eager young soldiers were at his heels, but grim old Stauffer, the first sergeant, growled his orders not to crowd; hearing which their captain half turned with something like a grin: "Tumble ahead if you want to," was all he said, and tumble they did, for the firing was sharp and fierce and close at hand, augmented on a sudden as 'Tonio's little party reached the scene and swelled the clamor with their Springfields. Another moment and, springing from rock to rock, spreading out to the right and left as they came in view of a little fastness along the face of a cliff, the troopers went scrambling down the adjacent slope and, every man for himself, opened on what

could be seen of the foe. Some men, possibly, never knew what they were firing at, but the big-barrelled Sharp's carbine made a glorious chorus to the sputtering fire of the scouts. Five hundred yards away, bending double, dodging from bowlder to bowlder, several swarthy Indians could be seen in full flight, apparently. Then old 'Tonio threw up a hand from across the stony chasm, signalled to his friends to cease, sprang over a low barrier of rock, disappeared one moment from view, then a few yards farther signalled "Come on." And on they went and came presently upon an excited, jabbering group at a little cleft in the hillside. A mule lay kicking in death agony down the slope. Another lay dead among the bowlders. An Apache warrior, face downward in a pool of blood, was sprawled in front of the cleft, and presently, from the cavelike entrance, came Lieutenant Harris and 'Tonio, bearing between them the form of an unconscious woman, and Stannard, as he came panting to the spot, ordering everybody to fall back and give her air, and somebody to bring a canteen, slapped Harris a hearty whack on the shoulder, whereat that silent young officer suddenly wilted and dropped like a log, and not until then was it seen he was shot—that his sleeve and shirt were dripping with blood.

And just about that hour, less than thirty miles away, based on Lieutenant Willett's verbal report, the commanding officer of Camp Almy was writing a despatch to go by swift courier to department head-quarters—a report which closed with these words:

"The presence at this juncture of Lieutenant Willett, aide-de-

camp to the department commander, was of great value and importance, and I trust that his decision to remain may meet approval. On the other hand, it is with regret that I am constrained to express my disapproval of the action of Lieutenant Harris, commanding scouts, who left the post with his men immediately after the alarm and without conference with me; was only overtaken by Lieutenant Willett after going several miles, and, when informed of my instructions, practically refused to be guided by them. Persuading a few of the scouts to follow him, he left the detachment, in spite of Lieutenant Willett's remonstrance, and started in pursuit of the marauders. As these must largely outnumber him, it is not only impossible that he should rescue the captives, but more than probable he has paid for his rashness with his life."

CHAPTER VIII.

"The Gray Fox" had but just received his promotion to the star, jumping every colonel in the army. He had been doing mighty work among the recalcitrant Apaches at a time when other commanders were having hard luck in their respective fields—one, indeed, forfeiting his own honored and valued life through heeding the sophistries of the Peace Commissioners rather than the appeals of officers and men who long had known the Modocs. For long years the warriors of the Arizona deserts and mountains had bidden defiance to the methods of department commanders who fought them from their desks at Drum Barracks, or the Occidental, but George Crook came from years of successful campaigning after other tribes, and in person led his troopers to the scene of action. One after another the heads of noted chiefs were bowed, or laid, at his feet. The pioneers, the settlers, the ranchmen and miners took heart and hope again, and the marauders to the mountains. Then came "our friends the enemy," from the far East, with petition and prayer. Suspension of hostilities, on part of the troops at least, was ordered, while most excellently pious emissaries arrived inviting the warriors to come in, to be reasoned with, taught the error of their ways and persuaded to promise to be good. The astute Apache had no objection to such proceedings. He

was certainly willing to have the soldier quit fighting, just as willing to come and hear exhortation and prayer, when coupled with presents and plenty to eat; most Indians would be. So the new general stepped aside, as ordered, and left the elders a fair field. "The Gray Fox" went hunting bear and deer, and while the Apache chieftains went down to the Gila to reap what they could from the lavish hands of the good and the gentle, their young men swooped on the stage roads and scattered ranches, and made hay after their own fashion while shone the sun of peace and promise. So happened it along the Verde and Salado that the Apache came down like the wolf on the fold, and so Harris had come up from the Southern Sierra, and 'Tonio had sworn that, all signs to the contrary notwithstanding, his people were not, as the agent declared, the pillagers and pirates. "Apache-Mohave? *No!* No!!"

"The Gray Fox" had ventured to give his views to the War Department, which in turn had ventured to express itself to the Secretary of the Interior. But let us lose no time in following further. The Eastern press, and such of the Eastern public as had any leisure to devote to the subject, persisted in looking upon Indian affairs from the viewpoint and remoteness of Boston, where once upon a time Miles Standish and our Puritan forbears handled such matters in a manner anything but Puritanical. Nothing was left to the military arm of the Government but temporary submission, so, as has been said, "the Gray Fox" went off on a hunt for bear, mountain lions, and such big game as was reported to be awaiting him toward the Grand Cañon to the north.

An adjutant-general of the old school was left in charge of the desk and the department, and all on a sudden found that while Peace and its commissioners held their sway far to the south, grim-visaged War had burst upon the northward valleys, and chaos had come again.

The couriers bearing Archer's report to Prescott found others, similarly burdened, from the upper reservation, from Camp Sandy, and even from points to the west and south of department head-quarters, all telling of death and depredation. So, while the chief of staff ruefully digested these tidings at the office, the couriers proceeded to have a time in town, to the end that, when replies and instructions were in readiness to be sent out, only two of the six were in shape to take them, and Archer's runner—one of the frontier scouts, half Mexican, half Apache—was one of the two.

Now, the chief of staff had been nearly three years in Arizona, had served in similar capacity to predecessors of "the Gray Fox," and naturally thought he understood the Apache, and the situation, far better than did his new commander, and the fact that he had allowed this conviction to be known had led to a degree of official friction between himself and the one aide-de-camp left that was fast verging on the personal. Bright, almost invariably the companion of the general in his journeyings, was even now with him, lost in the mountains ninety miles in one direction; Willett, the newly appointed aide-de-camp, was with the commander of Camp Almy, ninety miles away in another, while black-bearded Wickham stood alone at Prescott. Wickham had not been consulted when Willett was sent with con-

fidential instructions to Almy. Wickham would have disapproved, and the chief of staff knew it. Wickham *had* to be shown Archer's despatch, though the adjutant-general would gladly have concealed it, and now, in chagrin at the outcome of affairs at Almy, and in consternation at the ebullition all around him, the adjutant-general was quite at a loss what to do. Wickham, if asked, would have said at once, "Send for General Crook," but that would be confession that he, the experienced, did not know how to handle the situation. So again he took no counsel with Wickham, but issued instructions in the name of the department commander and ordered them carried out forthwith.

Then it transpired that only two couriers were fit to go. Thereupon, the commanding officer of the one cavalry troop at the post was ordered to detail three non-commissioned officers, with a brace of troopers apiece, as bearers of despatches to Date Creek, Wickenberg, Sandy and the reservation, while Sanchez, the Mexican-Apache Mercury, was ordered to hasten back to Almy by way of the Mazatzal. It was then but ten A.M., and to the annoyance of the adjutant-general, Sanchez shook his black mane and said something that sounded like *hasta la noche*—he wouldn't start till night. Asked why, the interpreter said he feared Apache Tontos, and being assured by the adjutant-general that no Tonto could be west of the Verde, intimated his conviction of the officer's misinformation by the only sign he knew as bearing on the matter—that of the forked tongue, which called for no interpreter, as it concisely said, You lie. Sanchez meant neither insult nor insolence,

but the adjutant-general regarded it as both, ordered another sergeant and two men got ready at once to ride to Almy, and bade the interpreter take Sanchez to the post guard-house and turn him over for discipline to the officer of the day. The sergeant started forty minutes later, with his two men at his back, and just thirty-five minutes behind Sanchez, who left the station on the spur of the moment, and the interpreter with a cleft weasand. It is a mistake for one man to attempt the incarceration of an armed half-blood of the Indian race. Sanchez started in the lead, afoot, and, in spite of his fear of Tontos, kept it all the way to the Mazatzal, where, as was later learned, he abandoned the paths of rectitude and the trail to Almy, and joining a party of twenty young renegades, complacently watched the coming of that sergeant and detachment from behind the sheltering bowlders of Dead Man's Cañon, and thus it happened that the orders Archer had been expecting three long days and nights were destined never to get to him.

It was this situation he had been puzzling over when at ten P.M. the officer of the day came in to say that new signal fires in the east were now being answered by others in the west, away over in the Mazatzal, and the general went forth to the northern edge of the "bench" to have a good look at them, wishing very much he had Stannard or Turner or "Capitan Chiquito"—little Harris—to help him guess their meaning.

But Stannard, with his sturdy troop, was still far afield, scouting the fastnesses of the Mogollon in hopes still of overtaking the marauding band that had ruined Bennett's ranch, murdered its owner, and borne away

into the wilds two helpless little settlers for whom a half-crazed, heart-broken woman at Almy was wailing night and day. Turner, following another route and clew, was exploring the Sierra Ancha south of Tonto Creek, and Lieutenant Harris, in fever and torment, was occupying an airy room in the post surgeon's quarters, the object of Bentley's ceaseless care, and of deep solicitude on part of the entire garrison.

Borne in the arms of Stannard's men, poor young Mrs. Bennett, raving, had been carried back to the ruins, and thence by ambulance to the post. There now she lay with her reason almost gone, nursed by the hospital steward's wife, and visited frequently by three gentle women, whose hearts were wrung at sight of her grief. Mrs. Stannard sometimes spent hours in the effort to soothe and comfort her. Mrs. Archer was hardly less assiduous, but was beginning now to have anxieties of her own. Lilian, her beloved daughter, fancy free, as the mother had reason to know, up to the time of their coming to this far-away, out-of-the-way station, seemed dangerously near the point of losing her heart to that very attractive and presentable fellow, Willett, the aide-de-camp, and Mrs. Archer did not half like it.

When the news was brought in to Almy that Mrs. Bennett had been recaptured, and that Lieutenant Harris was wounded in the fight which scattered her abductors, Willett was the first to mount and away to meet them. It was his orderly who came galloping back for the ambulance, and Willett who, before the arrival of the surgeon, had caused to be rigged up a capital litter on which, later, by easy stages his suffering classmate

was borne to the post. Harris was indeed sorely hurt, so sorely that the faintest jar was agony. Harris was weak and pallid from suffering when lifted to his couch in the doctor's quarters, bearing it all with closed eyes and clinching teeth, suppressing every sound. The general was there to bear a hand and speak a word of cheer, all the time wishing it were possible to overtake the courier, by that time nearly twenty-four hours on his way to Prescott, that he might amend the wording of that report. He was for sending a "supplementary" that very evening, but who was there to send? Sanchez was the only available post courier. The scouts were away with the cavalry. Both troops were now afield. Barely a dozen horses were left at the post, and every able-bodied, ambitious cavalryman was with his comrades on the trail. They who remained were the extra duty men, or the weaklings. Moreover, when Archer spoke of it to Willett, the latter very diplomatically argued against it. Wait a day and something *worth* sending would surely turn up. Two such captains as Stannard and Turner could not fail to accomplish something. They could be counted on to find the hostiles and punish them wherever found. Moreover, as yet, there were only evil tidings to send, for so the wounding of Harris would be regarded, and the recapture of poor Mrs. Bennett without her children would hardly compensate. There was still another thing to be considered, but even Willett balked at saying this. He had said enough to induce Acher to hold his hand another day at least, so why use more ammunition until he had to?

Two days, therefore, had gone by without news from

the field column or further message to Prescott. Then it was easy to persuade Archer that it was best to wait the return of Sanchez, and, for Willett, those two days, especially the long, exquisite evenings, had been full of sweet and thrilling interest. "I should be more with Harris, I suppose you are thinking," he had said to Lilian Archer, "and there I would be, but—I cannot rid myself of the feeling that he would rather be alone. He always was peculiar, and I seem to worry rather than to help him."

"But you were classmates," said she, "and I thought——"

"Classmates, yes," he answered, "but never much together. Even classmates, you know, are not always intimates."

"Still I should think that now—here—" she began again, her hand straying listlessly over the strings of her guitar, her slender fingers trying inaudible chords.

He glanced over his shoulder to where Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard, fast becoming warm friends, were in chat near the open doorway. Then his handsome head was lowered, and with it the deep, melodious voice.

"Can you not think that here, and now, I might have greater need of every moment? Any hour may bring my marching orders."

She drew back, just a little. This was only the evening after his return with the wounded. "You always welcome field orders," she ventured.

"I always have—hitherto."

The voice of Mrs. Archer was uplifted at this juncture, just a bit. "Lilian, dear, you and Mr. Willett

would be wise to pull your chairs this way. I've never liked that corner since 'Tonio's discovery. Where *is* 'Tonio, Mr. Willett?"

"I wish I knew, Mrs. Archer," said Willett, rising and holding forth a hand to aid Miss Archer to her feet—something she did not need, yet took. "He was with Stannard when I left. He was with him when they rescued Mrs. Bennett. He was said to be all distress when he saw that Harris was hit—and then he disappeared. Stannard's last despatch said he had not rejoined."

It was another beautiful, moonlit evening, and the post was very still. The men of Archer's two infantry companies were clustered about their log barracks or wandering away by twos and threes to the trader's store on the flats. The general was pacing the parade in earnest and murmured talk with the post adjutant. Bentley, the surgeon, was busy with his charges, having left Harris in a fitful, feverish doze. Not since the night of the calamity at Bennett's had the sentries reported sign of signal fire in the hills, but this night, before the last filament of gold had died at the top of the peak, Number Four had caught a glimpse of a tiny blaze afar over to the east, and instantly passed the word. Only half an hour it was observed, and then, away toward the south-east, an answering gleam burned for a moment against the black background of the Sierras. Then both went out as suddenly as they started.

The general was dining at the moment, and, believing that the fires would not so soon be extinguished, the officer of the day had not at once reported them. He

was at Archer's door as the veteran came forth, haranguing Willett, again his guest at dinner, but with anxious eyes turned at once to hear the report. "No matter what time it happens," he said, "hereafter, when signals are seen, let the guard notify me at once." And the officer retired musing over this bit of evidence that the commanding officer was growing a trifle irritable.

It was soon after guard mount next day that two runners from Sandy had come in, weary and hungry. "'Patchie sign—*todas partes,*" said the leader, after delivering his despatch. But he, too, was half Apache and had squirmed through without mishap. For two hours after reading Archer kept the contents to himself. The adjutant-general wished to consult him at Prescott. Ninety miles north-west by buckboard, through a country infested by hostile Indians! It was a trip he little cared to take and leave his wife and daughter here! At noon he had had to tell them, and tell Willett, who was teaching Lilian a fandango he had heard on the Colorado. Mother and daughter looked anxiously at each other and said nothing. It was decided he should wait until night before arranging when to start. Surely this night should bring news of some kind.

And surely enough, at ten came the summons that took him, field-glass in hand, to the northward edge of the little mesa again. Somewhere in the direction of Diamond Butte, almost due east, one fire was brightly blazing. Over in the Mazatzal to the westward there were two, and even as they stood and studied them, Archer dropped his glasses at an exclamation of sur-

prise from one of his officers, and there, gaunt and weary, yet erect and fearless, stood 'Tonio. Like a wraith he seemed to have blown in among them, and now patiently awaited the attention of the commander; yet, when accosted, all he would say in answer to question, for they knew not his native tongue, was "*Capitan Chiquito!*"

So they led him to the doctor's quarters, and Bentley tiptoed in to see what Harris was doing. He was awake, in pain and fever, but clear-headed. "Of course I'm able to see 'Tonio," said he. "I *need* to see him." Whereupon shufflings were heard in the hallway without, and presently in the dim lamplight 'Tonio knelt by the young chief's side, took the clutching white hand and laid it one instant on his head. To no other of their number had 'Tonio ever tendered such homage. Rising to his feet, he looked about him, his glittering eyes fixed one moment in mute appeal; another moment, and gloomily, they studied Willett's handsome face. Then he spoke, Harris half haltingly explaining. It began languidly on the latter's part. It quickly changed to excitement, then to vehement life. 'Tonio was telling of some sharp encounter wherein women and children had been slain, whereby the mountain tribes were all aroused, and then he had gone on to declare what Indian vengeance would demand. Impassioned, 'Tonio threw himself at the first pause on his knees by the side of the cot whereon lay his beloved *Capitan,* and it was to him he spoke. It was he who translated:

"No one," said 'Tonio, "should venture beyond sentry post either day or night. Even now the rocks and

woods about the station were full of foemen. "Get ready to fight them and to take care of the women and children. They mean revenge! They mean attack! Renegade Apaches!" said he, "all renegade! Apache-Mohave, no!"

CHAPTER IX.

The night was still young. The conference at the surgeon's house was brief, for Bentley, fearing for his patient, hustled all but 'Tonio out into the open air just as soon as the Indian signalled "I have spoken," which meant he would tell no more. Brief as it was, the interview had sent the wounded officer's pulse uphill by twenty beats, and Bentley knew what that meant. Still it had to be. 'Tonio brought tidings of ominous import, and the public safety demanded that his warning should be made known, and who was there to translate but Harris? "If it were only Chinook, now," said Willett, "I could have tackled it, but, except a few signs, Apache is beyond me."

So while the doctor was giving sedatives to his patient, and the doctor's servant giving food to 'Tonio, Archer gathered his few remaining officers about him in the moonlight and discussed the situation. From 'Tonio's description, the affray that had aroused the Apaches far and wide had occurred three days earlier, just at dawn, among the rocky fastnesses of the Mogollon, perhaps "two sleeps" to the north-east, the very direction in which Stannard was scouting. But it wasn't Stannard's command. 'Tonio said the soldiers were from up the Verde, and the scouts were Hualpais, and then Archer understood. Between the Hualpais,

finest and northernmost of the Arizona tribesmen, and the Tonto Apache there had long been feud. It was evident from 'Tonio's description that a *rancheria* of the latter had been surprised—"jumped" in the vernacular—just about dawn; that the Hualpais, rushing in, rejoicing in abundant breechloaders and cartridges, had shot right and left, scattering the fugitives and slaying the stay-behinds, who, crippled by wounds or cumbered by squaws and pappooses, could not get away. The soldiers, though only a hundred yards or so behind, were slow climbers as compared with the scouts, and though the few officers and men did what they could to stop the wretched killing, a few women and children were found among the dead, and the word was going the length of the Sierra, far to the south-east, and would never stop till it reached Sonora and Chihuahua, that the white chief had ordered his soldiers to kill, so they might as well die fighting.

"If they were to concentrate now, first on Stannard, and then on Turner," said Archer—"ambuscade them in a cañon, say—I'm afraid we'd see few of their fellows again."

"Or if they only knew their strength," spoke up the only captain left at the post, "and were to concentrate, say, five hundred fighting men upon us here, it's little the rest of the world would ever see of *us.*"

Archer turned half-angrily upon the speaker. "You never yet, Captain Bonner, have heard of Apaches attacking a garrisoned post, even though the garrison was smaller than ours, and I believe you never will. The

question *I* have to settle is how to send warning to our two field columns."

For a moment there was none to offer suggestion. There were present only seven officers, all told, Bentley being still with his young patient. Anxious eyes were watching the little group, their white coats gleaming in the moonlight. Over at the barracks a score of soldiers, slipping from their bunks, clustered at the wide-open doors and windows. Over at the hospital two or three convalescents, with the steward and the nurse, sat gazing from the shaded piazza. Over at the commander's quarters Mrs. Archer, Mrs. Stannard and Lilian, sitting closer for comfort, murmured occasional word, but their eyes seldom quit their anxious scrutiny. To Mrs. Stannard it was no novel experience. To Mrs. Archer and her daughter, despite their longer years in the army, it was thrillingly new. In the utter silence on the line and throughout the garrison the rhythmic tramp of feet, muffled by distance, could not fail to catch their straining ears, and far over across the parade, behind the barracks, betrayed by the glint of the moonlight on sloping steel, a shadowy little detachment went striding away toward the nearest sentry post.

"They are doubling the guard," said Mrs. Stannard. Then the group at the flagstaff broke up. Three officers went with the commander toward the office, others toward the company quarters. One came swiftly, purposely, toward the waiting trio. Lilian knew it was Willett even before they could recognize his walk and carriage. Mrs. Archer rose to meet him. All they

yet knew was that 'Tonio was in with tidings of some kind—Doyle had told them that.

"Tell us what you can," was all she said.

"The time-honored tale of Indian uprising," said Willett airily. "Something I've heard every six weeks, I should say, since they gave me a sword."

"But they've doubled the guard."

"Only changed it, I fancy. The general wants some few cavalrymen for a scout in the Mazatzal."

Mrs. Stannard knew better, but held her peace. The object at least was laudable, if not the lie. All three had risen now and were standing at the edge of the veranda, Mrs. Archer's gentle, anxious eyes following the soldierly form just vanishing within the shadows at the office, Lilian's gaze fixed upon the handsome features of the young soldier before her.

"'Tonio brought news, did he not?" asked Mrs. Stannard.

"'Tonio had to tell *some*thing, you know, to cover his mysterious movements. 'Tonio's story may be cock and bull for all we know. It is just such a yarn as I have heard told many a time and oft in the Columbia basin. Most Indians are born liars, and 'Tonio has everything to gain and nothing to lose in telling a believable whopper now. 'Tonio says his people are persecuted saints, and all others perjured sinners."

And just then, through the silence of the night, there rose upon the air, distant yet distinct, the prolonged, anguished, heart-broken wail of a woman in dire distress—a Rachel mourning for her children, and refusing to be comforted. There was instant scraping of chairs

on the hospital porch, and one or two shadows vanished within the dimly lighted doorway. "Oh, poor Mrs. Bennett!" cried Mrs. Archer. "I'm going over a little while. Come, Lilian."

"Let me go with you," said Mrs. Stannard, ever sympathetic with young hearts and hopes. But Lilian had been well trained and—went, the two wives and mothers walking arm in arm in front, the other two, the girl of eighteen, the youth of twenty-five, gradually dropping behind. The elders entered the building, following the wife of the hospital steward; the juniors paced slowly onward to the edge of the low bluff overlooking the moonlit valley, with the shining stream murmuring over its shallows in the middle distance. Lilian's white hand still rested on the strong arm that drew it so closely to the soldier's side, and both were for the moment silent. He seemed strangely quiet and thoughtful, and she stood beside him now with downcast eyes and fluttering heart, for, as she would have followed her mother, he had bent his head and, almost in whisper, said:

"Come—one minute. It may be my last chance."

And the girl in her had yielded, as what girl would not?

Presently he began to speak, and now his head was bowing low; his eyes, though she saw them not, were drinking in the lily-like beauty of the sweet, downcast face. One quick look she flashed at him as he began, then the long lashes swept her cheek.

"I could not tell your mother the whole truth, just then," he began. "I've got to tell you something of it

now. Until to-night I never knew what it was to—to shrink from news of action. Now—I know."

She wanted to hear "why," even when her own heart was telling her. She wanted him to say, yet coquetted with her own desire. "Is—it serious news?" she faltered.

"So serious that Stannard, or Turner, or both, may be in grave danger, and there's no one to go and warn them but—me!"

"You?" and up came the troubled, beautiful eyes.

"Yes. Ask yourself who else there is. The scouts are gone. Sanchez has not returned. There's but a baker's dozen of troopers and troop horses left at the post. The general needs to send a little party to explore the Mazatzal. 'Tonio can't be trusted. Harris has—practically—put himself out of it. Don't you know me well enough to know—I've got to go?"

She was only just eighteen. She had lived her innocent life at that fond mother's side. She had read of knightly deeds in many an hour, and her heroes were such as Ivanhoe and William Wallace, Bayard and Philip Sidney, the Black Prince and Henry of the snow-white plume. Four days agone her heart had first stood still, then thrilled with girlish admiration when they told her how Harris had met his serious wound, and, for just that day, that soldierly young trooper was the centre of her stage. Then Willett returned, with a different version, and other things to murmur to her listening ears. Then Willett had been at leisure two—three—long days, and, save that mournful tragedy at the ranch, casting its spell over the entire

post, sufficient in itself to strike terror to a girlish soul, to inspire it to seek strength and protection of the stronger arm, what else was there to occupy the heart of a young maid here at sun-baked, mud-colored, monotonous old Almy? The one thing that would transform a desert into paradise had blossomed in her fair, innocent, girlish bosom, and he who had marked the symptoms many a time knew that the pretty bird was fluttering to his hand. The one precaution needful was—no sudden shock—no word or deed to bring rude awakening.

But even now she stood, trembling a bit, trying *not* to believe that he must leave the post—must leave her, and on so dangerous a mission. She was silent because she knew not what to say, yet knew that what he had said almost turned her cold with dread. He saw the hesitancy, and struck again:

"Must go—to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Willett!" And now the little face, uplifted suddenly, was piteous as he could wish. It fell again for shame at her self-betrayal, for sheer helplessness and dismay, for the sudden realization of what the long days now would be without him, for what life might be if he never came back. With all her pride and strength and maidenly reserve she was struggling hard to fight back the sob that was rising to her throat, the tears that came welling to her eyes, but he *would* have the tribute of both, and murmured again:

"Lilian, little girl, don't you *know* why I cannot bear to go—just yet?"

And then, shaking from head to foot, she bowed her

face upon her hands, and Willett's arms were around her in the instant, and after one little struggle, she nestled in a moment, sobbing, on his heart. She did not even see the sentry coming slowly up the path, and when girl or woman is blind to all about her but just one man, her love is overwhelming.

It was he who whispered word of warning, as his lips pressed their kisses on her soft and wavy hair. It was he who calmly hailed the guardian of the night, asking if further sign had been seen, adding, "Runners may well be coming in to-night, just as did 'Tonio." It was he who promptly, cordially answered Mrs. Archer, calling Lilian from the angle of the hospital, kneeling instantly as though to fasten a loosened bootlace. And then, as he presently led his silent captive back toward the parade, talked laughingly of the sentry's broken English, imitating so well the accent of the Rhineland.

"No word of this just yet," he murmured, ere they reached the general's door, and saw that veteran hospitably awaiting them. "It is so sudden, so sweet a surprise. Come what may now, I shall not go until I have seen *you* again. What, general? Sangaree? I'd like it above all things!"

Two horsemen came trotting across the parade, threw themselves from saddle, and one stepped swiftly to the group, his hand at the hat brim in salute.

"Well, sergeant, you *have* been prompt!" the general was saying. "You have your letter for Captain Turner?—and Woodrow is to follow Captain Stannard? Good again! Do most of your trailing by night. The Apaches are cowards in the dark, and you

can't miss the trail. God be with you, my men! Your names go to General Crook in my first report!"

Another moment and they were away, and two more had taken their place—two who waited while Mrs. Stannard pencilled a few hurried words to her "Luce," while Lilian, with a world of rapture, thanksgiving and rejoicing in her heart, was striving to regain self-control, and avoid her mother's eye, a thing she never before had done, nor would she now be doing but for that splendid, knightly, heroic, self-poised, soldierly fellow, standing so commandingly, gracefully there, conferring one minute with her soldier father, and the next—helping Mrs. Archer to more small talk and sangaree.

CHAPTER X.

The night had gone by without alarm. No further signals were seen. No runners came in. Poor Mrs. Bennett, under the influence of some soothing medicine, had fallen asleep. The doctor, coming in late from a visit to the hospital, found Harris still wakeful, but not so feverish, and 'Tonio, worn and wearied, stretched on a Navajo blanket, seemed sleeping soundly on the side piazza, just without the door. The general and Willett had sat and smoked, with an occasional toddy, until after the midnight call of the sentries, the former still expectant of the return of Sanchez; the latter pondering in mind certain theories of Wickham as to the Apache situation, to which at first he had paid little heed. If Wickham were right, then Sanchez might never have reached Prescott. If so, the general need never have to amend that report.

And that the matter troubled Archer more than a little Willett was not too pleased to see. Moreover, it was evident that not only Bentley, the surgeon, but Strong, the young adjutant, Bucketts, the veteran cavalry subaltern doing duty as post quartermaster, and the three company officers of Archer's regiment stationed at Almy—all were determined to consider Harris decidedly in the light of the hero of the recent episode. It was a matter Willett would not discuss with them,

nor, when they somewhat pointedly referred to Harris and his part in the affair, was it Willett's policy to say aught in deprecation. As "the representative of the commanding general" temporarily at the post, and observing the condition of affairs, it was his proper function to give all men his ear and none his tongue, to hear everything and say nothing. But the adjutant knew, and had not been able to keep entirely to himself, the fact that Sanchez was the bearer of a report adverse to Lieutenant Harris—that no modification thereof had been prepared—even after Harris was brought in dangerously wounded, the result of his daring effort to rescue an unfortunate woman from a fearful fate. The adjutant had gone so far as to hint to that much-loved lieutenant-colonel of infantry, Brevet Brigadier-General Archer, that he should be glad to write at his dictation a report setting Harris right, as surely as the other had set him wrong, and for the first time Strong found his commanding officer petulant and testy. It was exactly what Archer himself thought it his duty to do, yet he was annoyed that any one else should think so. Moreover, he had taken counsel with Willett, and Willett had said that he would be the last man to deny a classmate and comrade any honor justly his due, nor would he stand in the way of General Archer's writing anything he saw fit, *but,* as the officer present on the spot and cognizant of all the circumstances connected with Harris's going, *he* had yet a report to make to the department commander.

"Frankly, general," said he, "I do not wish to say

what I know unless I have to—and your changing your report might make it necessary."

This had occurred the night before 'Tonio's coming, and now, in the silence of midnight, as the two sat smoking on the veranda, while Lilian lay in her little white room listening in wordless rapture, in sweet unrest, to the murmurous sound of the deep voice that had enthralled her senses, while Mrs. Archer, wife and mother, slept the sleep of the just and the wearied, the old general turned again to that subject that weighed so heavily on his heart and soul.

"By heaven, Willett," he said, "here it is midnight and no Sanchez. If he isn't in by mail-time to-morrow I'll have to send a party—or else a courier—to Prescott."

"Does the mail usually reach you Sunday, sir?"

"Hasn't failed once since my coming! They send it by way of McDowell, over on the Verde. If Sanchez isn't here, or the mail either, I'll know that 'Tonio was right, that we're hemmed in, and that they have killed our messengers. And they are expecting to hear from me at head-quarters, and probably wondering at my silence. Another thing to be explained."

"Another?" said Willett.

"Another. Of course I must straighten out that matter about Harris. I own I sent it under wrong im—impressions. I thought at first he had ignored my authority, but that was unjust. The more I think of it, the more I blame myself."

"Then—how you must blame *me!*"

"Well—no! You doubtless feel that he did ignore

you and your authority, though I own it wasn't my intention that you should assume *command* over him. You are both young and you perhaps judge more sharply than I, but I've learned to know the fallibility of human judgment. I've suffered too much from it myself, and the fact stares me in the face that Harris knew just what ought to be done, and went and did it. He rescued that poor creature at the risk of his life, and he —deserves the credit of it."

Willett was silent a moment. He seemed reluctant to speak. Finally and slowly he said:

"General Archer, it is an ungracious thing to pull down another man's reputation, especially when, as in this case, Harris and I are classmates and I, at least, am *his* friend. And, therefore, I still prefer to say nothing. I was in hopes that Captain Stannard and his fellows might be back by this time, with the Bennett boys for one thing, and with—the truth for another."

"What truth?" demanded Archer.

"The real truth—as I look upon it—the real credit of that rescue, you will find, sir, belongs to Stannard and his troop, with such little aid as they may have received from those who advised and guided them—the scouts. *But* for Stannard the hostiles would have gotten away, not only with Mrs. Bennett, but with Harris. Harris made a hair-brained attempt to rescue her single-handed. He only succeeded in running his own neck into a noose. Your wisdom, and God's mercy, sent Stannard just in the nick of time, and there's the whole situation in a nut shell."

For a moment Archer was silent. Who does not like

to hear praise of his wisdom, especially when self-inclined to doubt it?

"But the doctor tells me Harris had the Indians on the run before ever Stannard was sighted—that he and his handful of scouts alone attacked, defeated and drove them, that his scouts were chasing them and were mistaken themselves for hostiles, and were fired at by Stannard's men at long range."

"Yes," said Willett, with calm deliberation. "That is just the story I should expect Harris to tell."

And sore at heart, and far from satisfied, the general suggested a nightcap, and Willett presently left him, though not, as it subsequently transpired, for the adjutant's quarters and for bed. It was late the following day before his next appearance near the Archers.

Sunday morning had come, as peaceful and serene as any that ever broke on New England village, and Sunday noon, hot and still, and many an hour since early sun up anxious eyes had scanned the old McDowell trail, visible in places many a mile before it disappeared among the foothills of the Mazatzal, but not a whiff of dust rewarded the eager watchers.

Archer's binocular hung at the south-west pillar of the porch, and another swung at the northward veranda of the old log hospital. The road to Dead Man's Cañon wound along the west bank of the stream, sometimes fording it for a short cut, and that road, the one by which Sanchez should have come, was watched wellnigh as closely as the other. Nothing up to luncheon time had been seen or heard of human being moving without

the limits of the post; nothing by Lilian Archer of her gallant of the night before.

In times of such anxiety men gather and compare notes. The guard had been strengthened during the night, and its members sat long in the moonlight, chatting in low tone. The officer of the day, making the rounds toward two o'clock, noted that the lights were still burning at the store, and, sauntering thither, found a game going on in the common room—Dago seeking solace from his sorrows in limited monte with three or four employés and packers, while in the officers' room was still another, with only one officer present and participating. To Captain Bonner's surprise Lieutenant Willett, aide-de-camp, was "sitting in" with Bill Craney, the trader, Craney's brother-in-law and partner, Mr. Watts, Craney's bookkeeper, Mr. Case, a man of fair education and infirm character who had never, it was said, succeeded in holding any other position as long as six months. Here, as Craney admitted, he hadn't enough to occupy him three weeks out of the four, and, so long as he could tend to that much, he was welcome to "tank up" when he pleased. That clerk had been a gentleman, he said, and behaved himself like one now, even when he was drunk. The officers treated him with much consideration, but to no liquor. Willett, knowing nothing of his past, had been doing the opposite, and Mr. Case's monthly spree was apparently starting four days ahead of time. Moreover, Mr. Case seemed inspired by some further agent, for though unobstrusive, almost, as ever, he was possessed with a strange, feverish impulse to pit him-

self against Willett, and almost to ignore all others in the game. A fifth player was a stranded prospector whom Craney knew, and presumably vouched for. Luck must have been going Willett's way in violation of the adage, at the time of Bonner's entrance, for the table in front of him was stacked high with chips, and four men of the five were apparently getting excited.

Bonner seldom played anything stronger than casino and cribbage, nor did he often waste an hour, night or day, in the card room. This night, however, he was wakeful, and had seen that which even made him a trifle nervous. He had visited every sentry post, finding his men alert and vigilant. 'Tonio's words had already been communicated to the guard, and self-preservation alone prompted every man to keep a sharp lookout. Bonner had noted as he stepped out on the side porch of his quarters, where hung the big earthen olla in its swathing bands, that 'Tonio lay, apparently sound asleep, at the side door of the doctor's quarters, and Bonner found himself pondering over the undoubted devotion of this silent, lonely son of the desert to the young soldier lying wounded within. Bonner left him as he found him. 'Tonio had not stirred. Barely twenty minutes thereafter, as he finished examination of the two sentries on the north front, and came down along the bank at the rear of the officers' quarters, he found Number Five, a Civil War veteran and, therefore, not easily excited, kneeling at the edge, with his rifle at "ready," gazing steadily toward a clump of willows at the stream bed, some five hundred feet away, listening so intently that the officer halted,

rather than mortify him by coming on his post unchallenged. The brilliant moonlight made surrounding objects almost as light as day, and Bonner could see nothing unusual or unfamiliar along the sandy flat to the east. So, finally, he struck his scabbard against a rock by way of attracting Number Five's attention, and instantly the challenge came.

"What was the matter, Five?" asked Bonner, after being advanced and recognized, and the answer threw little light upon the subject.

"I wish I knew, sir, but there was some one—crying—down there in the bush—not five minutes ago."

"Crying! Your're crazy, Kerrigan!"

"That's what *I* said, sir, when first I heard it, but—whist now!"

Both men bent their ears—the veteran sentry, the veteran company commander. Both had spent years in service, in the South in the war days, in the West ever since, and neither was easily alarmed.

As sure as they stood there somebody was sobbing—a low, heart-breaking, half-stifled sound, down there somewhere among the willows, that for two hundred yards, at least, lined the stream. "Come with me," said the captain instantly, and together the two went plunging down the sandy slope and out over the flats beneath, and into the shadows at the brink, and up and down the low bank between the fords, and not a living being could they find.

"What first caught your ear?" asked Bonner, as together, finally, they came plodding back.

"Sure, I heard the captain come out on his side porch

for a drink at the olla, sir, and saw him step over and look at the doctor's place before starting for the guard-house, and I knew he'd be around this way and was thinking to meet him up yonder where Number Four is, when I heard Six down here whistling to me, and when I went Six said as how the dogs way over at the store was barking a lot, and he said had I seen or heard anything in the willows—he's that young fellow that 'listed back at Wickenburg after the stage holdup—and while we was talkin' he grabbed me and said, ' Listen! There's Indians out on the bluff! I heard 'em singing.' I told him he was scared, but when I came back along the bank I could have sworn I saw something go flashing into the willows from this side, an' then came the cryin', and then you, sir."

Bonner turned straightway to his own quarters, to the side porch at the doctor's—and 'Tonio was gone. Peering within the open doorway, he saw the attendant nodding in his chair by the little table where dimly burned the nightlamp, close to the cot where Harris lay in feverish slumber. Next, the captain started for the post of Number Six, near the south-east corner of the rectangle, and there was the corporal and the relief, just marching away with " the young feller that 'listed in Wickenburg." A new sentry, another old soldier, had taken his place. There was nothing to do but tell him to keep a sharp lookout and report anything strange he saw or heard, particularly to be on lookout for 'Tonio. Then he pushed on after the relief, and then, catching sight of the lights at the trader's, strode briskly over there and stopped a few minutes, asking himself should

he tell Willett what had been heard, and incidentally to watch the game. Willett, however, was engrossed. His eyes were dilated and his cheeks were flushed, albeit his demeanor was almost affectedly cool and nonchalant, and Bonner had not been there five minutes before a queer thing happened. Willett, playing in remarkable luck, had raised heavily before the draw. Case, with unsteady hand, had shoved forward an equal stack. The prospector and Craney shook their heads and dropped out. Only three were playing when Willett, dealing, helped the cards according to their demands, and for himself "stood pat." It was too much for the brother-in-law, but the bookkeeper, who had been playing mainly against Willett, and apparently foolishly, now just as foolishly bet his little stack, for without a second's hesitation Willett raised him seventy-five dollars. It was a play calculated to drive out a small-salaried clerk. It was neither a generous nor a gentleman's play. It was, moreover, the highest play yet seen at Almy, where men were of only moderate means. Even Craney looked troubled, and Watts and the prospector exchanged murmured remonstrance. Then all were amazed when Case drew forth a flat wallet from an inner pocket, tossed it on the table, and simply said, "See—and raise *you.*"

Now there was audible word of warning. Watts looked as though he wished to interpose, but was checked instantly by Case himself. "Been saving that for—funer'l expenses," said he doggedly, "but I'm backin' this hand for *double* what's in that."

Craney lifted the wallet, shook it, and three fifty-dol-

lar bills fluttered out upon the table. Willett looked steadily at Case one moment before he spoke:

"Isn't this a trifle high for a gentleman's game?" said he.

"That's what they said at Vancouver, two years ago, when you bluffed out that young banker's son."

Willett half rose from his chair. "I *thought* I'd seen your face before," said he.

"What I want to know," said the bookkeeper instantly, all deference to rank or station vanished from tone and manner, "is, do you see my raise now?"

There was a moment's silence, during which no man present seemed to breathe. Then slowly Willett spoke:

"No, a straight isn't worth it." Whereupon there was a moment of embarrassed silence as the stakes were swept across the blanket-covered table, then a guffaw of rejoiceful mirth from the prospector. Case, as though carelessly, threw down his cards, face upwards, and there was not so much as a single pair.

"The drinks are on me, oh, yes," said he, "but the joke's on the lieutenant."

Yet when Bonner left, five minutes later and the game again was going on, there was no mirth in it. Nor was there mirth when the sun came peeping over the eastward range this cloudless Sabbath morning, shaming the bleary night lights at the store—the bleary eyes at the table. Bonner found them at it still an hour after reveille, and ventured to lay a hand on Willett's shoulder. "Can I speak with you a moment?" he said.

Willett rose unsteadily, but with dignity unshaken by

change of fortune. He had lost as heavily, by this time, as earlier he had won.

"May I be pardoned for suggesting that you would be wise to get out of this and—a few hours' sleep? The general is up and worried. 'Tonio is gone!"

CHAPTER XI.

The fact that the post was cut off from the rest of the world, that neither runner from the field columns, courier from Prescott, nor mail rider from McDowell had succeeded in getting in, while 'Tonio, head trailer, had easily succeeded in getting out, was a combination calculated to promote serious reflection on part of the garrison this ideal Sunday morning. Perhaps it did, but so far as talk was concerned a very different fact ruled as first favorite. It was known all over the barracks by breakfast time that Case, the bookkeeper, had bluffed out the young swell from the Columbia who had come down to teach them how to play poker and fight Apaches. "Willett stock" among the rank and file had not been too high at the start, had been sinking fast since the affair at Bennett's Ranch, and was a drug in the market when the command, as was then the custom of the little army, turned out for inspection under arms, while Willett was turning in for a needed nap. Strong, his official host, knew instinctively where Willett must be, when he tumbled up to receive the reports at morning roll call and found the spare bed untouched. He said nothing, of course, even at guard mounting, when, together, he and Captain Bonner walked over to the office, where sat the post commander anxiously awaiting them. It seems that

even after Bonner's friendly hint the game had not ceased at once. Willett had played on another hour in hopes that luck would change, but by seven Craney called a halt, said that he and Watts must quit, and intimated that Willett ought to. Case, though well along in liquor, still kept his head and lead, and would have played, but by this time Willett was writing I.O.U.'s. The prospector's cash was gone. The hitherto modest, retiring, silent man of the desk and ledgers had won heavily from the officer, yet only a trifle from his employers, and Craney suggested a recess until night. "Then we'll meet again—and settle," said Willett, half extending his hand.

"You bet we'll settle," said Case, the bookkeeper, wholly ignoring it, and even then the fact was noted and thereafter remembered.

"I think I won't go up to the post just now," said Willett to Craney. "Perhaps you have——"

"Certainly, Mr. Willett. Come right in here," said the trader hospitably, leading the way into a darkened room. "Take a good nap; sleep as long as you want to. I'll send you in a tub if you like." The tub was gratefully accepted, and then they left him. At noon when the general asked Strong if Willett "wasn't feeling well," Strong said Willett had been up late and was probably still asleep. Bonner, it was known, had not turned in again after two o'clock, and the discovery that 'Tonio was missing. He was dozing on the porch in his easy-chair when first call sounded for reveille, and Lilian, like gentle-hearted Amelia, lay dreaming of her wearied knight as having kept vigil with the sen-

tries to the break of day that she and those she loved might sleep in security, and now, of course, he must indeed be wearied.

Therefore there came a surprise to her, and to the fond and watchful mother, when toward four o'clock in the afternoon Mrs. Stannard dropped in to chat with them awhile, and to tell about Harris, by whose bedside she had been sitting and reading for nearly two hours. Mrs. Archer welcomed the news. The doctor had promised to let her know as soon as he considered it wise for her to go, and the general was so anxious and disturbed on Mr. Harris's account. It so happened that the general, with a small escort, had ridden over to search the valley with glasses from the peak, and then the first thing Mrs. Stannard said was, "I thought that Mr. Willett might have been glad to go with the general."

"And did he not?" asked Mrs. Archer, after one quick glance at Lilian's averted eyes.

"Why, no," and now Mrs. Stannard hesitated; "I saw, at least I think I saw, him coming up from the river a little while ago. He may have been following 'Tonio's trail, you know. It was easy enough in the sand, they said, but once it reached the rocks along the stream-bed they lost it." Then wisely Mrs. Stannard changed the subject.

But if she and they knew not where and how Willett had spent the night and hours of the day, they and Harris, by this time, were the only ones at Almy in such ignorance. Moreover, Almy was having a lot of fun out of it. No one had ever heard of Case's playing before in all the time he had silently, unobtrusively,

gone about his daily doings at the post. Three weeks out of four he sat over the books and accounts, or some writing of his own, saying nothing to anybody unless addressed, then answering civilly, but in few words. The other week, just as quietly and unobtrusively, he was apt to be busy with his bottle, sometimes in the solitude of his little room, sometimes wandering by night down along the stream, sometimes stealing out to the herds, petting and crooning to the horses, sometimes slyly tendering the herd guard a drink, and always accompanied by a pack of the hounds, for by them he was held in reverence and esteem. He never accosted anybody, never even complained when a godless brace of soldier roughs robbed him of his bottle as he lay half-dozing to the lullaby of the babbling stream. He simply meandered a mile and got another.

From this plane of inoffensive obscurity Case had sprung in one night to fame and, almost, to fortune. A single field had turned the chance of war, and the placid Sunday found him the most talked of man at the post. Rumor had it that he had quit five hundred dollars ahead of the game, and the most conservative estimate could not reduce it more than half. For the first time Camp Almy awoke to the conclusion that an experienced gambler was in their midst—one who had spared the soldier and his scanty pay that he might feed fat, eventually, on the officer. Rumor had it that Case's trunk contained a roulette wheel and faro "lay-out." In fine, long before orderly call at noon, in the whimsical humor of the garrison, he was no longer Case, the bookkeeper, but "Book, the Case Keeper,"

and every frontiersman, civil or military, in those days knew what that meant.

And even as they exalted Case, who toward afternoon had disappeared from public gaze, refusing to be lionized, so would they have abased Willett, who likewise had concealed himself, on the plea of needed sleep, yet had done but little sleeping. Willett was haunted by a memory, and not pleasantly. The fact that he had lost over a month's pay troubled him less by far than that he had lost repute. He had suffered much in pocket, but more in prestige. He had been a successful player in the Columbia country, too much so for the good of scores of comrades, but especially himself. He could have found it in his heart to throttle that guffawing clown, whose rude bellow of rejoicing over Case's brilliant bluff and his own defeat, had brought even the dago and his fellows in staring wonderment to the open door. He would have pledged another month's pay could he have throttled the story he knew now would be going the rounds. He was even more humiliated—far more—than they knew. They all would have shouted had they seen the hand he laid down, but he had striven to carry it off jocosely, to say *he* had only been bluffing, and was very properly caught at his own game. Oh, he had shown a game, sportsman-like front, and had striven to pass it all off as a matter that worried him not in the least, but Craney, clear-headed, believed otherwise, and Case, muddle-headed as he was by noon, knew better, and had his reasons for knowing—reasons as potent as were those

that moved him wholly to ignore Willett's half-proffered hand.

Case had nothing in particular to do all day, and could sleep if so minded. Willett, not knowing what moment he might be called upon to take active part in stirring service, should sleep, and so prepare himself, yet could not. Case's personality, and Case's one reference to Vancouver, two years previous, haunted and vexed him sorely. Where and under what circumstances had he seen the man? Only for three weeks had he been at the fine old post referred to, while a big court-martial was there in session, and he, with other subalterns, had come as witnesses. There had been dinners and dancing and fun and flirtation, both at the post and in Portland. There had been card-playing in which he was easy winner, and not a little of his winnings had gone for wine. There had been foolish things said in pink little ears, and even written in silly missives that now he would have been glad to recall, but—but no harm to him as yet had come from them. There had even been a girl whom he had never seen before nor since that visit, nor wanted to see again, nor hear from, yet from her he *had* heard, and more than once—piteous, imploring little letters they were. But, heavens! he was busy hunting Indians when they began to come, and then they had ceased to find him, rather to his relief, but none of these episodes or epistles in any way included Case, yet somewhere he had seen him, somewhere he had heard his voice, and somewhere Case had marked his method of play. Case said Vancouver, but though two or three steep games had

there or thereabouts occurred—games in which his soldier comrades had withdrawn as too big for them—he, with his luck and brilliancy, had dared to pursue to the end and came out envied as a winner. And still this did not seem to point to Case.

Not two hours' sleep did Willett get that Sunday morning. He was awake, hot, feverish, and athirst at noon, craving ice, which could be seen in the mountains only a day's march away, but had never yet been made to last through the homeward journey. Craney brought him a cool and dripping canteen and some acetic acid, the best he could do, and had proffered bottled beer, cooled in the big olla and retailed at fifty cents, but Willett sought information rather than sleep, and indirectly inquired as to Case's antecedents. Inferentially, he wished Craney to understand that he believed Case to be a professional, and Craney blamable for permitting him to play. Craney saw the move and checkmated at once. "Case has had dozens of chances to play—dozens of 'em—since I brought him here from Prescott, and never before has he sat into anything bigger'n a dollar limit. He never *would* play in the other room. He came out as quartermaster's clerk, nearly two years ago. With whom? Why, Major Ballard brought him out and had to turn him loose for drinking. No, Ballard was never at Vancouver. Then my bookkeeper got shot in a pay-day row and left the books in a muddle. I *had* to hire Case to come and balance them—best accountant and bookkeeper I ever had—square to the marrow, though he wants one week off a month, and is absolutely stalwart t'other three,

but he will not talk of his past. Ballard told me he came with tiptop letters from officers of rank in San Francisco, who said he was incorruptible, even when he drank, whereas my clerk, who had been a model of sobriety, robbed right and left. Case has gone off now, somewhere down among the willows, I reckon. He'll be drunk for three days, sobering three days, and straight the seventh. If you hadn't started him last night he'd be sober now. And if you hadn't come into it that family game would have stopped at one, with nobody the worse nor wiser. You said you had no use for a dollar limit game."

There was no comfort, therefore, in Craney's visit. Willett took another cool bath, dressed about two, and being shown the path Case generally followed, sauntered away, quite as though he had nothing on his mind, and was presently lost beyond that same willowy screen. He at that time, at least, was not thinking of 'Tonio and the lost trail.

At five the general, with Strong and Bonner, could be made out four miles away, riding back from the peak. "I'll go a moment and inquire for Mr. Harris," said Mrs. Archer, "and ask the doctor when *we* may visit him." So, leaving Lilian with Mrs. Stannard, and intending to be gone but a few minutes, the gentle, anxious-hearted woman, sunshade in hand, went forth from the shelter of the low veranda into the slanting, unclouded rays, and presently tapped lightly at the doctor's open door. There was no answer, yet from somewhere within came sound of masculine voices. Entering the dark hall, she tapped again at the entrance

to the doctor's sitting-room, or den. A Navajo blanket hung like a *portière* across the open space, for door there was none, and, as no one came in answer to her modest signal, she ventured to push the curtain a bit to one side and peer within. The room was but dimly lighted, all windows but one on the north side being heavily draped. The doctor's reclining chair and reading table, the latter littered with books, pamphlets and pipes, were visible through a reminiscent haze of not too fragrant tobacco smoke, for the old predominated over the new. A rude sideboard stood over against her, between the northward windows, and thereon was stationed a demi-john of goodly proportions, with outlying pickets in the way of glasses. Bentley himself, though one of the old school, was an abstemious man, and therefore enabled to have at all times a supply of reliable stimulant for such of his callers as were of opposite faith. That some of that ilk had recently favored him was presumptively evident, no more by the sideboard display than by the sound of voices from an inner room, where two or three were uplifted in discussion, and neither was the doctor's.

Now, Mrs. Archer much wished to see young Harris, to assure him of their deep interest in his welfare, of their desire to be of service to him, and their reason for not earlier intruding. Gentle and unselfish though she was, there was distinct sense of chagrin that Mrs. Stannard, or any woman, should have anticipated her coming. The doctor had promised to say just how soon he could approve her seeing his patient, and it was the doctor's fault she had come no sooner. Not until days

thereafter did she know that Harris had asked for Mrs. Stannard. Not for even a Christmas home-going would Mrs. Stannard have let her know it—but Mrs. Stannard was a rare, rare woman.

But if the doctor thought it unwise that his patient should receive the visits of ministering angels such as she and they, what, said Mrs. Archer to her stupefied self, could Dr. Bentley mean by permitting the visits of such disturbers as these whose angering words came distinctly to her ears? She stood, half-dazed, unable for a moment to determine what to do—whether to enter at once—enter, and in the name of her husband, the commanding officer, enter emphatic protest against such exciting language at such a time, in such a presence—or whether to retire at once and hear no more of it. One voice, at the moment low and guarded, was that of a stranger—she had never heard it before. The other, however, she knew instantly as that of Harold Willett. No wonder she stood amazed, never doubting they were addressed to Harris, at the first words—Willett's words—to reach her ears!

"You are in no condition now to talk to a gentleman, and I refuse to listen. You came here to lie about me—to undermine me, and I know it, and the quicker you go——"

"I came here to speak God's truth and *you* know it!" came the instant answer, and in instant relief she knew it was not the voice of Harris. "As to undermining—by God, it's to block *your* undermining another and a better man I've come! If that isn't enough for you

—to block your doing here—what you did to that poor girl at Portland——"

But a rush and a scuffle, the sound of a blow, broke in upon the words, just as the attendant, affrighted, came running out, just as Dr. Bentley, astounded and indignant, came hurrying in. Mrs. Archer, in bewilderment, fell back into the sunshine, only presently to see Willett, flushed and furious, hasten forth from the rear door and turn straightway to the adjutant's quarters adjoining—only to be overtaken in a moment by the attendant, panting: "The doctor said would Mrs. Archer please come back one minute, he'd like to speak with her." And Mrs. Archer turned again and went.

CHAPTER XII.

Ten minutes later, when the general and his little escort came dustily into the garrison, his first question on dismounting was for Willett, and it was Lilian who had to answer that she believed he was at Mr. Strong's. So thither, with but brief, though kindly, word with Mrs. Stannard, and as brief an expression of his satisfaction that Mrs. Archer had gone to see Harris, the veteran took his way. The horses were led to stables. The other officers, hastening homeward, bowing in hurried, perfunctory fashion to the ladies, turned again at sound of his voice, and all three together entered the adjutant's house, an orderly remaining at the door. Lilian looked anxiously after them and Mrs. Stannard inquiringly. "They have seen something, I know," said the girl, "and something father is puzzled about. He would not have come and gone without a kiss." Already Mrs. Stannard had noted his fond custom, had marked its omission now when, ever since luncheon, he had been away, and she, too, divined that he was preoccupied, even perplexed. But once already she had too quickly spoken her thoughts, and there must be no more of that. In three minutes the little party came forth again, Willett with them now, and, field-glasses in hand, away they strode to the northward edge of the plateau and went speedily along toward a point at the

back of the hospital where there stood a little platform, railed about with untrimmed pine, a rustic lookout much affected by the men in the long evenings, but seldom visited when the sun was up. It took no time at all for half the remaining garrison to turn out and, at respectful distance, stand curiously watching them, and little more for the other half to come flocking out of doors. "Seen somethin' from way up on the Picacho," explained the orderly, as he jogged by with the heated horses, "an' came back akiting!"

Two minutes more and the adjutant, Strong, came running from the platform. "Don't unsaddle," he shouted. "Bring those horses back and get some more! Send the escort up here at once!"

The officers at the lookout had not even unslung their pistol belts, and Willett now was seen to set down his binocular and start away. The general called to him and he half turned and hurriedly answered: "Back just as quick as I can get my Colt, sir." He was unfastening his blouse at the throat as he went, and even at the distance men could see how hot and flushed he looked, while the others seemed so hard, "tried out" and fit for anything. Presently the half dozen horsemen, who had been with their chief to the Picacho, came trotting forth from the corral, followed by two or three led horses. Strong mounted the first to reach him and sent another to his quarters for Lieutenant Willett. Then Captain Bonner came strolling back as though quite unconcerned. "May as well get the men under arms," said he to his alert first sergeant, and away went every man of Company "C" on a run for the barracks.

"Needn't wait for Willett," the general was heard calling to Strong, who, with a little party, sat in saddle eagerly awaiting orders. So down the slope they went, just as the doctor and Mrs. Archer, apprised in some way of the excitement, came forth and saw the dust cloud in their wake, and the snorting troop horse pawing the sand in front of Strong's. Old Bucketts, the quartermaster, came limping up the line, his florid features a deeper red, and all he could tell in answer to question was, "They see something beyond the Point. Who's that horse for, orderly?"

"Loot'nt Willett, sir—said he'd be out in a minute."

But the minutes proved long, and Bucketts went in to help, if need be, and to get information, if possible. Willett had kicked off his fine uniform trousers and ununiform Oxfords, and was cursing the striker who had hidden his scouting rig. "Why the devil didn't you go as you were?" asked Bucketts unsympathetically. "They're raising the dust far as the ford already. What's up, anyhow?"

"Can't tell! Don't know! Nobody knows! They send scouts out—couriers out—messengers out, and spend hours wishing somebody'd come with news, and then when somebody's seen coming get rattled and send half the garrison out to meet——"

But suddenly catching sight of the disapprobation on his caller's face, Willett broke off short. No wonder Buckett's looked astonished at such language from a staff officer. Nor was that veteran questioner long in sizing up the cause. It added nothing to his respect for Willett, and not a little to his concern. He knew

by this time, as did almost every man except the post commander, how and where Willett spent the night and morning—knew that he had left the store only an hour or so previous, as though to follow and find the bookkeeper—knew that Case had been drinking, and saw now that Willett had been following suit. Without a word on that head, or another question as to the causes of the excitement, he stumped about the premises, busying himself in hunting for the missing items, and presently found them hanging under a calico curtain that Willett had already nearly torn down in unsuccessful, unseeing search. "Here you are," he said, tossing the garments on the bed. "Here's your pistol, Colt's 44; every chamber loaded and ready for business. You'll use a different belt when you've been a month in Arizona—and you'll shed top boots for 'Patchie moccasins. Let me help you, Willett. You're a bit blown. Here, douse your head in that—" and as he spoke Bucketts half filled a bowl and went limping out to the olla for more and cooler water, leaving Willett fussing at his riding breeches and damning Strong's striker for being away among the gaping, staring, empty-headed gang at the bluff at the moment he was most needed.

As Bucketts was lifting the vessel from the cool depths of the hanging reservoir, he heard his name faintly called, and there, at the side door of the doctor's quarters, pale and suffering, barefooted and mantled with a sheet, his arm and shoulder bandaged, stood Harris.

"Tell Willett to come out," he said. "I must see him before he goes."

"You go back to bed. I'll tell him," but Harris stood his ground despite the fact that the attendant had laid a hand upon his unbound shoulder, and was begging him to return. Bucketts set the pitcher inside the door. "Here's cooler water, Willett," he said, "and here's Harris at the door—says he must see you before you start."

Then, without waiting for answer, the quartermaster hurried along the path to the front in search of the doctor; saw him far over back of the hospital, heading for the platform; saw Mrs. Archer, on her own veranda by this time, in eager talk with Mrs. Stannard, and Lilian drooping at the corner pillar; hurried back to get his stick and to further rebuke Harris, when, afar down to the south-east came the sound of a shot, half-muffled by distance, and, gazing from the rear end of the little gallery, he saw, a mile or more away across the stream and skirting the willows, two horsemen coming at top speed; saw, emerging from the willows at the near side of the ford, a man who walked heavily through the yielding sand, holding his hand to his face. He, too, had heard the shot and was making, 'cross lots, for home. It was Case, the bookkeeper, disturbed, perhaps, said Bucketts, in his siesta among the willows and doing his best to gain shelter. Before Case could get a fourth of the way across the barren flat, tacking perceptibly among the cactus and grease wood, the riders burst in sight again and went lashing away to the store—two ranchmen or prospectors, said Bucketts, and they've been having the time of their life getting in. 'Tonio said the Tontos were all about them, and

here was additional proof. The last Bucketts saw of Case he was lurching on toward the store, but, just then, buttoning his riding jacket and girding on his revolver belt, out came Willett.

"Well, what is it?" was his brief, almost sullen question. And then came his classmate's answer—one that Bucketts long remembered.

"You are going up the valley, I take it, and there is an alarm of some kind. Now, Willett, remember this: no matter what you have seen or suspect, the Apache-Mohaves had no part in the devil's work at Bennett's. I have 'Tonio's word for it, and will bring proofs."

"Damn 'Tonio's word! He's a renegade and a deserter himself! He's playing a deep, double game, and you yourself suspected it three days ago. Now he's proved it. I've no time to talk." And impatiently he turned away and sprang for his horse. A moment more and he was in saddle, had set spurs to his excited mount, and then, full gallop, went tearing to the edge of the mesa, lifted his hat in salutation to the general, and dove down the slope, across the lower bench, away through an upper ford of the sluggish winter stream, and out upon the sandy flats beyond.

"Rides well," said the general, looking after him.

"*Rides* very well," said the surgeon, looking after Strong. "Can you see anything yet, sir?"

"Could see two horses ten minutes ago, with some running figures far up the valley. Can't make 'em out at all. Strong'll fetch 'em—Strong and Willett. Good stock there, doctor!"

"Tiptop, where Strong is concerned," said the doctor grimly. The events of the earlier afternoon had tended to add to his disapprobation of the other. "There's something up at the store, sir, I think," he added, with a swift change of subject. "I saw men running that way just now. Here comes Bucketts!"

And Bucketts came, hobbling sturdily. "It's two ranchmen, I think, and there was a shot down toward the south-east ten minutes ago."

The general looked back. Down in front of the log barracks Bonner's company, in fatigue dress, had formed ranks, and the sergeants were distributing ammunition. Across the parade, the verandas of the Mess and office buildings were deserted, but one or two men stood staring toward the invisible plant of the trader. Close at hand, near the hospital and again lining the edge of the mesa, a score of yards farther to the left, a number of soldiers of the other company were eagerly watching developments. Even with the naked eye, two miles or more up the valley, Strong's little detachment, black dots of skirmishers, could occasionally be sighted pushing on northward, while, at heavy gallop, heading for the front, Willett was still in plain view; but, at the moment, nothing could be seen of the objects that were the original cause of the excitement.

From the Picacho, it seems, both Strong and Bonner had made out through their glasses two tiny black dots in the direction of Bennett's ruined ranch, coming slowly toward the post, but still five or six miles away. From the platform, forty minutes later, two horsemen had distinctly been seen moving swiftly about, close

to the willows that lined, in places, the rocky stream bed. More than this, the general was sure he had caught sight of three or four figures afoot, skipping actively about when moving at all. What he and his advisers believed was that Sergeant Woodrow and his comrades were, for some reason, trying to make their way back to Almy and had found Apaches barring the way. Therefore had Strong and his little party been sent forth to meet, to aid, to bring them in. Therefore had Willett, of his own motion this time, and without the delegated authority he bore when following Harris, set forth at speed to overtake them, forgetful, in the eagerness of the moment and the possible over-excitement of his faculties, that he had promised Archer to be back just as soon as he'd got his Colt—that calibre 44 Colt now belted at his hip, with every chamber loaded.

And now as the eager watchers at the platform trained their glasses on the distant field, Bucketts, taking up the handsome binocular left by the aide-de-camp, had time to notice its fine silver mounting and the engraved "H. Willett, U. S. A.," in exactly the same script as that which adorned the revolver. Then, as he adjusted it to his eyes, it occurred to him to tell the doctor of Harris's coming to the side door, and of his most earnest language and manner, whereat the general turned sharply:

"What's that? Harris said no Apache-Mohaves?"

"No Apache-Mohaves in the affair at Bennett's Ranch, sir, on 'Tonio's authority, and Willett scoffed at both statement and 'Tonio."

"By heaven," said Archer, "'Tonio was right in saying we were cut off, isolated here, and if he hadn't slipped away in that mysterious fashion I'd rather take his word than—than Willett's impressions. Where has Willett been—all morning—anyhow? He never came near me!"

Everybody within earshot knew, and nobody answered. Archer looked queerly about him. Bonner and Briggs gazed fixedly through their glasses. Bucketts was absorbed in the adjustment of his. The doctor said he must go over and give Harris a rebuke for getting up, and started forthwith, and Archer, without further question, turned again to his survey. He was of the old army—and knew the signs.

For a moment every living object up the valley seemed to be shut from view. Bonner, by way of changing the subject, had so far "white-lied" as to exclaim "There they are again!—er—no," but the ruse was unnecessary; Archer understood. Almost at the moment, however, came a sound from the open windows of the matron's room, adjoining the hospital, against which all present would willingly have closed their ears—the prolonged, heart-breaking, moaning cry of a woman robbed of all she held dearest—poor Mrs. Bennett waking once more to her direful sorrows, and filling the air with her hopeless wail. For a moment it dominated all other sound. "For heaven's sake, doctor," cried Archer to the assistant, "can't you and Bentley devise something to still that poor creature? Has she lost her mind, too?"

"Sounds like it, sir. There's only one thing that will bring it back—that's those babies."

"If anybody can get 'em it will be Stannard," answered the general prayerfully. "This, whatever it is, up the valley may be news from him and of them! God grant it!"

"Look!" cried Bonner at the instant. "I see Willett! See him?—galloping up that— Why, hell and blazes—I beg your pardon, general—he's 'way out beyond Strong's people! See 'em—down there by the willows? Where in— Gad! d'ye see that? Why, his horse jumped and shied as if he'd— Look! He's running away! He's gone!"

Gone he had. Not once again, before the going down of the sun, now just tangent to the western heights, did they catch sight of Willett or Willett's horse. One after another the watchers again found Strong within the field of vision and followed him down to and across the stream, and others of the mounted party were seen, some wearily following their officer, others moving about a point among the willows where last had been seen the two strangers whose odd movements led to the going forth of the searching party. But it was half an hour later, and light was growing dim in the valley, while the eastward crests of the Mogollon were all ablaze, when a single rider was made out coming homeward at speed. It was dusk at Almy when his panting horse struggled painfully up the slope and, dismounting, a weary rider saluted the post commander and handed him a note. By this time Mrs. Archer, Mrs. Stannard and Lilian, too, were on the platform, and the mother's

arm stole instinctively about the daughter's slender waist, while every eye was on the general as he quickly opened, then slowly read aloud the pencilled words:

"We have the couriers safe. They are from up the Verde, badly scared and worn out. Say they have been chased by Indians ever since three o'clock, were almost out of ammunition. Lieutenant Willett, venturing too far on the east side, while we were to the west of the stream, must have encountered some of them. We heard firing, and followed. Found his horse dead among the rocks and Willett lying near, stunned, but certainly not shot. Could see nothing of his assailants. Ambulance needed. Respectfully,

"STRONG."

Mrs. Archer's arm wound still closer about her daughter's trembling form. Lilian said no word, but her face was white, her soft lips were quivering. Mrs. Stannard sympathetically closed in on the other side, as the general gave brief directions, and presently, between the two, the girl walked slowly away, only the general following with his eyes. Bentley went back once again to quietly tell the news to Harris, but was ready when the ambulance stopped at his door. Lilian had been persuaded to go and lie down, said Mrs. Archer, when her grave-faced husband came home at dark. "That is best," was all he said, but he turned and took his fond wife's face between his hands and kissed it thrice, then went forth again to meet the coming couriers. It seems their orders were to deliver their despatch in person to the commander of Camp Almy, and, sending them on for refreshments, he read by the light of a lantern the message from the commander of the District of the Verde. Young warriors by the hundred were out, said the agent at the reservation, even

the Apache-Mohaves. Mail messengers, ranch people and others had been murdered close to Camp Sandy. Friendly Indians report soldiers killed in Dead Man's Cañon in revenge for death of Comes Flying, accidentally shot. Captain Tanner and Lieutenant Ray are out from Camps Sandy and Cameron, with strong commands, and will try to communicate with Almy. "Nothing has been heard of Lieutenant Harris and his scouts," said the despatch, "but rumors are rife as to Indian depredations near you. It is feared that in your advanced position you may be surrounded, and communication cut off, but no fears are entertained as to your ability to take care of yourself. If you still have cavalry scouting in the Tonto basin, warn them of conditions and report when possible."

"So much for so much," said the general. "Now for Willett," and a mile farther out he met the ambulance coming in, Willett and the doctor aboard, the former with a broken collar-bone and a bad headache. Moreover, Willett was in vicious mood.

"General Archer," said he, "the shot that killed my horse was meant for me, and the Indian who fired the shot was Harris's paragon, 'Tonio."

CHAPTER XIII.

That was a stirring night at Almy. The general, contrary to habit, was very grave and quiet, saying little, drinking nothing, even the customary toddy being declined. The doctor, also contrary to habit, was drinking a little and thinking a lot, but saying nothing. An abstemious man, as a rule, and a temperate man at all times, he seemed inclined to sample his Monongahela more than once before midnight, when, having gotten his patients to sleep, he tried to do likewise. "They are on an even keel again," said Bonner, referring to the two casuals, "and I am not sorry to see it." Evidently there had been comparison of notes between Strong and Bonner, and an agreement of some kind, for both held that Willett had exceeded his authority, as well as his discretion, in conducting a single-handed charge on an outnumbering enemy, secretly hidden behind rocks and ridges. Strong's men said that Lieutenant Willett, spurring hard, had called across the stream for them to follow him, and three of those nearest the bank plunged through the shallows and were barely three hundred yards behind him when, from their right front among the rocks at the foot of a bluff, the shot was fired that wounded the lieutenant's horse, which veered at once and ran away down among the willows. No, they hadn't charged. They turned, too. For all

they knew, there might have been a thousand Apaches in hiding there, and when the lieutenant turned they turned. It was not until Lieutenant Strong and the rest of the men came up with them that they pushed ahead and found the officer and his horse lying among the rocks by the stream. Willett had been hurled out of saddle when the frenzied beast went suddenly down, and there he lay, stunned and bleeding, while the poor brute was quivering in the agonies of death.

"Did you see anything of 'Tonio?" Strong was asked, as a mattter of course.

"Not so much as a shred of his breechclout," said Strong, "nor of any other Indian nearer than a mile away, and they were running for the rocks. It was too dark to do any trailing." But for the shot that killed Willett's horse, and the tremendous tales of the courier scouts, Strong would have been inclined to say there were not a dozen Indians in the north valley. "If there were more," said he, "and if they were really hostile, even though afoot as they were, was it likely that two couriers on worn-out horses could have escaped them? No," said Strong. "There is something about it we don't understand, neither does Willett, for all he's so positive."

But Strong admitted that two things puzzled him. The horse was certainly shot, and Willett's Colt, the handsome revolver that he set such store by, was certainly gone. Willett, when he came to, had asked for it. He swore that he had drawn it from the holster, and was riding at "raise pistol" when the shot was fired—that he clutched it as his maddened horse tore

blindly down the slope, and then, among the rocks, stumbled, staggered and fell. Now revolver, holster, "thimble belt" of cartridges—all were gone.

The couriers were made to tell their tale while the doctor and his assistants were getting Willett to bed, and Willett, from several conditions, was not easy to soothe and quiet. He had not been sparing of the *spiritus frumenti* that went with other medical supplies in the ambulance. Archer and the surgeon saw it, and said nothing. That was natural, possibly, under the circumstances, and could be controlled later. Archer cross-questioned the couriers at some length. They had not followed the Verde Valley southward. They had "lit out" along the Mesa road, toward Baker's Butte, until they found the trail by way of Hardscrabble and Granite Creek. They had succeeded in evading Apaches until the third day out, and after leaving the East Fork they saw smokes that made them wary, and once down in the Wild Rye Valley, and in sight of the old Picacho, they came upon recent Indian signs in the sand—moccasin tracks going down stream bed toward the post. Then they "chassayed," as they said, out into the open, midway to the foothills, so as to keep out of rifle range of both, and then Indians came a-running at them from the foothills, trying to head them off and take them alive, they supposed, and they had dismounted and fought and driven them back, and, oh, they must have killed three or four of 'em! and in fact had had to fight for their lives most of the afternoon. Archer listened, incredulous, puzzled. Frontiersmen's and fishermen's tales have much in common.

These were men who had been employed three years, they said, by the agent at the upper reservation and had been detailed for courier duty with Colonel Pelham, commanding the district of the Verde. One was American, the other Mexican. Their story might be straight, but, with all the valor to which they laid claim, it seemed strange to Archer and his officers that two men could break their way through an encircling horde of hostiles such as they described, and hold a hundred fierce Apaches four long hours at bay.

Harris was awake, and in highly nervous condition, and begging that he might be allowed to see and question these couriers, but both doctors, regular and contract, said no, not this night. And so, toward midnight, the couriers were permitted to go to bed. The doubled sentries were cautioned to observe the utmost vigilance. The lights were extinguished at the store, by way of telling everybody that neither game nor glass was to be had before the morrow. The general was urged by his devoted adherents, Bonner, Bucketts and Strong, to get such sleep as was possible, and the post was committed to the charge of Lieutenant Briggs, officer of the day. The lights were still burning low at the hospital and in the doctor's quarters and Strong's, as, with a look about the moonlit valley and a word to his sergeant, Bonner rejoined his comrades at the quartermaster's veranda.

"Odd," said he, with a tilt of his head toward the quarters next beyond, "of all our little fighting force, so far the only casualties are with our two casuals."

That was at one o'clock in the morning. At three,

by which time all but the guard were presumably in bed, Mrs. Archer, lying anxious and wakeful, listening for the sound of sigh or sob from Lilian's little room and praying that sorrow might be averted from that beloved child, felt sure at last that she heard a footstep, and, stealing softly across the narrow hallway, found Lilian kneeling at the curtained window and gazing out upon the brilliant night. There was no reproach in the mother's murmured words. Well she knew what it portended that her daughter should be at this hour sleepless and striving, perhaps, to see the light from the window where her young hero lay prostrate and suffering. Not one word had they yet exchanged about him, but many a woman, even with mother love brimming over in her heart, would have upbraided, and many another would have "nagged." What other word have we for that feminine method, the resort of so very many, the remedy of so very few? But Mrs. Archer simply circled a loving arm about the slender form. "We're all on guard to night, aren't we, daughter?" she murmured, fondly kissing the tear-wet cheek. "It was so long before your father dropped to sleep. Have you—heard anything?"

Burying her face in the dear refuge of years, with her arms thrown instantly about her mother's neck, Lilian's sole answer was a shake of the bonny head. It was as much as saying, "You know that isn't the matter; yet, thank you for trying to think so—thank you for not asking me what is."

"Well, *I* did," murmured Mrs. Archer, slowly rising to her feet, and drawing Lilian with her. "I'm sure

I heard low voices down there on the flat toward the ford. The sentries are more than usually watchful and taking note of everything. You know it was right out there Number Five heard the crying in the willows only last night." And all the time she was quietly leading her child back to the little white bed.

Then suddenly Lilian stopped and lifted her head. "I hear now," said she. "It's coming!" Across the hall stealthily they sped, and together were presently peering from the southward window in Mrs. Archer's room. Two dim figures could be seen crossing the flat from the direction of the ford, coming straight for the low point of the mesa whereon stood the quarters of the commanding officer. Then they began breasting the slope, but exchanging no word. As they reached the top Mrs. Archer caught Lilian's hand. "It's an Indian—a runner, I believe. See, that's the corporal of the guard with him! It's a despatch of some kind!"

And so it proved. Five minutes later, Briggs, officer of the day, was heard coming down the line; his sword clicked at the steps; his foot was on the veranda, but before he could knock, Mrs. Archer met him at the door.

"We saw them coming," said she. "Is it a despatch —for the general?"

"From Captain Turner," said he gravely. "I read it, hoping not to have to disturb the general, but— there's been a fight and some are wounded. Turner needs instructions."

The army-bred woman needed no further word. She knew at once what had to be done. "Wake father,

Lilian, dear," she gently called from the foot of the stairs. "Will you come in, Mr. Briggs? I can light up in a moment."

"There's light in abundance out here, thank you, Mrs. Archer. Besides, I have our runner." And, turning back, he pointed to the steps where, still watched by Corporal Hicks, the dusky messenger squatted wearily. All Apaches looked alike to Hicks. His attitude was plainly indicative of a conviction that treachery of some kind was afoot, and this particular envoy had designs on his commander or that commander's wife. They could hear the veteran bustling about upstairs, hurriedly donning his uniform. Then came Strong, with his quick, bounding step, for Briggs had called him before disturbing the "Old Man." A moment later, by the clear light of the unclouded moon, Archer was hurriedly reading Turner's brief despatch.

BIVOUAC ON TORONTO CREEK, November 24th, 187–.

POST ADJUTANT,

CAMP ALMY.

We have had two more brushes with Tonto Apaches, resulting in the breaking up of two rancherias and the scattering of the band, leaving several dead in each affair, also a few wounded bucks and squaws that I had to leave, as we had no means of sending them to the post or caring for them in any way. Sergeant Payne, Corporal Smith, G, and Troopers Schreiter and Wenzel, wounded, are doing as well as can be expected, but must remain at this point under a small guard while we follow the renegades. The scouts report many signs toward the Black Mesa, and we shall strike wherever we find the hostiles, but I shall have but twenty-five men with me now, and barely forty rounds per man. Instructions sent by bearer may reach me among the foothills toward Diamond Butte. Otherwise, we shall return by the way we came. Trooper Hanson, died of wounds in the affair previously reported, was buried here.

Respectfully,

TURNER, Commanding.

"Then the other runner failed to get in," said Archer gravely. "There was a fight before this. Turner's found a raft of Indians. This despatch is two days old now. Have we nobody who can talk with this Indian?"

"Nobody, I fear, sir," answered Strong, bending over the scout and examining the brass identification tag worn by each of those regularly employed and mustered. "He's a Hualpai. No. 21. Even Harris doesn't know that tongue, sir."

"If anybody here does, it's one of those two that got in from Verde last evening," said Archer reflectively. "Turner evidently had no idea the hostiles were all about us, and he thinks the previous despatch must have reached us. Corporal, go find the couriers and fetch them here. Be seated, gentlemen," he continued, in his courtly way, then turning from everybody, stepped out on the sandy level between his quarters and the office building, and began pacing slowly up and down.

What was to be done? No word had come from Stannard. Stirring, yet disquieting news they now had from Turner, whose wounded lay in need of medical attention a long day's march through stony wilds, with jealous and savage eyes watching every trail. Here at Almy he had two companies of sturdy foot, capable of covering ground almost as fast as the cavalry, but wearing out shoe leather much faster. Twenty of these fellows could fight their way through to the Tonto, but might have just as many more wounded to care for, and be unable to transport them. Moreover, with so many

hostiles on every side, was he justified in stripping the post of its defenders? It was no pleasant situation. It was more than perplexing. Presently he turned and, using such signs as he thought might be comprehensible, asked the impassive runner if he knew where the first fight took place, and the Hualpai, as would almost any Indian partially gathering the drift of a question, began a rambling reply, pointing as he spoke, with shifting finger, all over the range to the south-east.

"Bella, dear, have we anything that this incomprehensible creature could eat?" asked Archer. "It may help matters." And presently the lady of the house appeared at the hall door again, with a tray in her hands. Briggs ceremoniously took it, and set huge slices of bread and jam before the gaunt mountaineer, who found his feet in an instant; received a slice on the palm of his outspread hand; lifted it cautiously, his yellow teeth showing hungrily; smelled it suspiciously, thrust forth his tongue, and slowly tasted the strange mixture on the surface; then, with confidence established, finished it in four gulps, and, like a greyhound, looked eagerly for more. Briggs laughed and pointed to the tray on the steps, but the Hualpai shook his head and drew back shyly.

"You'll have to give it piece by piece, Briggs," said Strong. "His squaw would scoop the whole trayload into her skirt or blanket, but not a Hualpai brave."

Approached in accordance with Hualpai views of table etiquette, the Indian ate greedily, and was still eating when the corporal came and, with him, the sleepy and dishevelled courier, the American. And now in the

radiant moonlight the strange war council was resumed.

"Ask him, if you can, where the first fight came off, and who was sent with the despatch," demanded the general of the new-comer, upon whom the Hualpai looked in recognition, but with neither light nor welcome in his piercing eyes. Question and answer in halting, uncanny speech progressed fitfully a moment. Then came the report:

"He says there was a fight the first day out; another when they struck Tonto Creek, and two soldiers were killed."

"And as to the first runner?"

"He says 'Patchie Mohave brought it all way safe. This buck met him going back. He said he gave it to 'scout capitan' out by Picacho."

"'Out by Picacho!' 'Scout capitan!' Who on earth does he mean?" asked Archer, with a sudden fear at heart.

Once again, stumbling question, much gesticulation, many words in strange gutturals—and a name. Then the final report:

"He means Apache-Mohave—'Tonio!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THREE anxious, watchful days went by, with anxious, watchful nights intervening, with no further tidings of 'Tonio or Stannard or Turner, of friend or foe from the outside world, and with only one attempt on part of the invisibly, yet perceptibly, surrounded garrison to communicate with the field columns. "Hualpai 21," the only designation he would own to (the real name, in the absence of some tribesman to speak for him, one could rarely learn from an Indian), was given his fill of food and rest, then, with a despatch to Turner, was sent forth Monday night south-eastward, the way he came, and bidden if he reached the rugged height known as El Caporal, some twelve miles to the south-east, and deemed it safe to do so, to send at sunrise three quick mirror flashes toward the flagstaff, repeating twice or thrice to be sure of its attracting attention. Hualpai 21 took with him one of those cheap little disks of looking-glass, cased in pewter, at that time found at every frontier store. He took also the injunction to give his despatch to Captain Turner or one of his men, but to no Indian whomsoever—'Tonio in particular. It was the last attempt of the week.

For, from dawn until the sun was an hour high, the watchers watched in vain. Three signal glasses, telescope and binocular, were trained upon the heights

and no one of them caught the faintest spark of reflected light. The nearest approach to a signal was seen by a corporal of the guard and sentry Number Six an hour after midnight, when, in quick succession, two faint, firefly flashes, unrepeated, were visible afar out due east of the Picacho, and they could have been caused in only two ways—somebody experimenting with a mirror and the moonbeams, the moon being then about three hours high and three-quarters full, or else, as they were ruddier than moonshine, somebody taking two quick shots, probably at somebody else. The corporal counted seconds up to twenty and more, and even in that breathless silence, heard not a sound to warrant the belief.

Yet a few hours later that sun-blistered morning, the bookkeeper Case "blew in for a bottle," as he expressed it; remarked with engaging frankness that he believed he had still a day or so in which to taper, and would be home and on deck if the Apaches didn't get him meantime; and, being delicately invited to state where he had spent the night, replied as frankly as before, "Down at José Sanchez's," meaning thereby the down-stream resort two miles distant, where prospectors, packers and occasionally men from the post, in peace times, at least, went for unlimited mescal and monte. Since the death of Comes Flying, the disappearance of 'Patchie Sanchez (the runner, half-brother to Sanchez, the gambler), and the general outbreak among the Indians, it had been shunned as utterly unsafe, and reported abandoned. When cautioned by Watts against returning thither, Mr. Case replied that

now that the Indians spurned it, for not even 'Tonio would set foot anywhere about the ranch, the ghost of the brother was seen there every night. He had seen it and it was an honest ghost, and a convivial spirit, which was why last night's bottle had lasted no longer. Moreover, Case said that when he was drinking he was only at home in half-bred society and couldn't live up to the high tone of the post. When told of Mr. Willett's further mishap, Case sobered for a moment in manner, and said Mr. Willett was unwise taking so many chances, and Mr. Willett would be in big luck if he got away from Almy without further puncture. Somebody else had been shot at last night. He and the ghost had heard it.

This at the moment was regarded as semi-maudlin talk, but at morning office hour Watts was sent for, was told what the guard had seen, and asked what Case had really said, rumor being, as a rule, inaccurate. Then Archer rebuked Watts for letting Case go in his intoxicated condition, and it was decided to send a little party in search, in hopes of fetching him in and finding out more about the alleged shooting. The party found Case without any trouble. He sat singing to himself and swinging his legs from the table in the abandoned rookery, the half-emptied bottle on one side and a " monkey " of spring water on the other, scornful alike of danger or demands, but indomitably courteous. The party took a drink with him as promptly invited, but found him implacably bent on holding the position. Not until argument and whiskey both were exhausted would he listen to reason and the

suggestion to return to the post. That being the only means to more whiskey, he started affably enough, but before going half a mile declared he had left or lent his revolver. "There's only one revolver at Camp Almy just like it," said he, with drunken dignity, and then, with sudden gravity, "an' that one—*isn't* at Camp Almy."

The infantry sergeant in command of the little party tried to wheedle Case out of his whim, but it was useless. Back he would go, and they, half supporting, had to go with him. From the drawer of the battered old table he drew the missing weapon to light, and it stood revealed—one of the famous Colt's 44, made soon after the Civil War to replace the percussion-capped "Navy" carried by most officers of the army until late in the '60's. In the hands of the cavalry at the moment, and for experimental purposes, were nickel-plated Smith and Wesson's of the same calibre, and nearly the same length of barrel, also one or two other patterns of the remodelled Colt. But, as Case said, this was a special make and model, differing slightly from any that Sergeant Joyce had ever yet seen; but not until later did the sergeant or his comrades attach any significance to Case's statement, "there's only one at Almy just like it."

His weapon recovered, his mental balance slightly restored, and with the further inspiration of replenished flask ahead, Case made the difficult essay to tramp the two sandy miles back to the store and the still more difficult task of there accounting for himself and explaining his enigmatical sayings. Strong, as directed,

strove to keep him to the point, but the one more drink Case declared indispensable on his final arrival at dusk sent flitting the last filaments of reason, and the poor fellow maundered off to sleep on his little cot in the darkened room, where he was bolted in and left for the night.

"Only one pistol like it at the post, and that—isn't at the post," Strong found himself repeating again and again that night, as, after Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard had read their patient into a doze and taken their departure, the adjutant stood for a moment by Willet's bedside. "And now Willett has lost his, and presumably the Tontos, or perhaps the Apache-Mohaves, have got it!"

They had wandered away in the darkness together, those two brave and tender-hearted army women, each with a keen anxiety of her own, each striving to be helpful to the other. Three invalids were there now at Almy to whom they were giving many hours of care and nursing. Poor Mrs. Bennett gained little in mental or bodily health. The fearful scenes of that long night of horror and rapine still seemed vividly before her in her few hours of fitful slumber, and were this state of things to continue long, said the doctor, insanity would be a merciful refuge. An hour or so each day these ministering angels gave to the young officers. Harris, severely shot, was mending fast, his perfect physical condition lending itself admirably to his restoration. Willett, but slightly injured, should be sitting up, with his shoulder in a frame and his arm in a sling, but he was mending only slowly, and had not a little fever. Harris, accus-

tomed to self-denial, seemed to require no physical comforts. Willett, something of a Sybarite, craved iced drinks and cooling applications that gave more trouble, said Strong, than twenty Harrises. Willett had even gone so far as to suggest that the ladies must be tired of reading aloud, possibly Miss Lilian might relieve one or other, and possibly, hope whispered, both. Harris, who would have welcomed that presence and possibility as he would no other, had ventured nothing beyond the expression of a hope that Miss Archer was quite well.

As for Miss Archer herself, what man can say just what thoughts, emotions, hopes and fears were rioting in that gentle and innocent, yet troubled heart. A very unheroic little heroine is this of ours. It was a time when she might well be thinking of the perils by which they and their defenders were encompassed round about, of the bereaved and broken-hearted woman crying to heaven for her murdered husband and her stolen children, of the scouts and couriers shot down from ambush in their efforts to reach them in their isolation or to creep through with messages to the columns afield, of the wounded lying with but scant attention and puny guard, weary marches away, of the comrades killed or died of wounds in fierce grapple with the warriors of the desert and the mountains—even of this young soldier within their gates, sore stricken in daring rescue of a helpless woman, he to whose coolness and command of self—and others—had saved her from the rattler's fang. Very possibly she did think of it—and often—and tried to think of them still oftener, but all the time, it must be owned, in her heart of hearts she was hearing again

the soft, caressing tone of that deep, rich voice—" the words of love then spoken;" she saw again the lustrous eyes that shone and burned into hers despite their drooping lids, the graceful, gallant form of that picture of the knight and gentleman whose swift wooing had made such wondrous way. Lilian Archer was but a child in spite of years and schooling. She spent her earliest years within the shadow of the flag and the sound of the drum. She had seen nothing of garrison life from that morning in '61, when she had just passed her sixth birthday, when they were bundled aboard a wheezing river stern wheeler and floated for many a day and many and many a long mile down a muddy, twisting stream—her father so grave and anxious, and some of the officers with him so urgent and appealing. She could not understand why her mother should so often sit with tear-brimming eyes and clasp her to her bosom with the boy brother she so loved—and teased. Father's home was in a proud old border state, and they went there for a week or two, after that sorrowful day in St. Louis when three of father's old friends and comrades came for one last conference and then—a last good-by—two of them refusing his hand. They had resigned and followed their state. They had striven to take him with them to swell the ranks of the proud young army of the South. They had loved him well and he them, but there was something floating overhead, from the white staff at the stern, he held still dearer. One officer, who was most urgent in his pleadings, was her bonny " Uncle Barney," mother's own brother, and when he left, without kiss for her or handclasp for the sad-faced soldier

in the worn uniform of blue, mother's heart seemed almost breaking. Father took them to *his* father's old home, and left them there while he went to drilling militiamen north of the Ohio, and was presently made a colonel of volunteers. But the people who lived about them were all for the South, and they could not forgive mother for his taking sides against them; so, throughout the long bitter struggle, while he was at the front or suffering in Southern prison, as happened once, and from Northern suspicion, as happened much more than once, they lived in lodgings in a quiet little country town, where brother and she went hand in hand to school and saw little of the outer world and nothing of the war. Then at last came peace, and in '66 the reorganization of the army, and father—in a general's uniform on a major's pay. Then in '69 General Grant appointed brother a cadet, and all were so proud and hopeful when he left them for the Point. He was the image of Uncle Barney, who was killed leading his splendid brigade in one of the earliest battles in Virginia, and, like Uncle Barney, brother was high-spirited and impatient. Mathematics and demerit set him back in '70 and dropped him out entirely in '71, when father was weeks away across the deserts of Arizona, and they were in lodgings at San Francisco, and poor mother was nearly distraught with grief and anxiety. Brother never came back to them. He went straight, it seems, to the Brooklyn Navy-Yard; enlisted in the Marines, and, within five months thereafter, jumped from the deck of the "Yantic" in a swift tideway at Amoy, striving to aid a drowning shipmate, and was never seen again. That

was the saddest Christmas they ever knew. Father had to return to his post, and all that year of '72 they wore deep mourning and went nowhere. During the spring of '73 mother was rallying a little, and loving army friends from the Presidio and Angel Islands, who used to come to see them so often, now sought to have Lilian visit them; but wisely Mrs. Archer kept her at her studies and her music and away from possible fascination of the garrison, and except, therefore, for two dances given by the artillery, and one charming, rose-bowered afternon reception at Angel Island, Lilian had seen nothing of army life and next to nothing of army beaux, until in all the ardor and innocence of sweet, winsome, wholesome girlhood—buoyant, beautiful and in exuberant health and spirits, she was suddenly landed here at this out of the way station in uttermost Arizona, and brought face to face with love and destiny.

For two days she had been hoping that mother would suggest that she, too, might come when they went for the afternoon visits to their wounded. But, though mother had twice taken her to sit a few minutes by the side of poor, frenzied Mrs. Bennett, there came no intimation that she might follow to the bedside of Lieutenant Willett, whose voice the child was longing to hear again, whose face she craved to see. No woman of heroic mould, perhaps, was Mrs. Archer. Hers was one of those fond, clinging natures, capable of any sacrifice for the husband or child she loved. She had turned her back on the home and the people so dear to her when unhesitatingly she followed the soldier husband she rapturously loved, and now, though she yearned to take her daughter

to her heart and kiss away the wistful, pathetic, pleading look in the fond eyes that never before had appealed to her in vain, something told her it were best to let her fight it out, even to suffer, alone, than admit, even to her, the possibility of a growing love for this brilliant and dangerous young gallant, as to whom she had unwittingly heard such damning accusation. It had not taken Mrs. Archer long to learn that Case, nerved by drink, had appeared at Harris's bedside that Sunday afternoon, asking to speak with him alone, only to be speedily followed by Willett, and by the altercation she had overheard. Under the circumstances, as known to her, Mrs. Archer was thankful that, since he could not leave the post, Lieutenant Willett could not even leave his room. Not with her knowledge and consent should her gentle Lilian be again brought within the sphere of his influence.

But Love that laughs at locksmiths was yet to find his way, and that right soon.

CHAPTER XV.

Harris was up and fuming for action. With his wound unhealed and his arm utterly useless, he was insistent that he should be permitted to mount and ride. "What could you do?" asked Bentley. "The post is surrounded. Every trail and both roads are watched day and night. Your horse is all that's left you. 'Tonio is gone. 'Tonio has turned traitor!"

"That," said Harris, "I will not believe for an instant."

They brought General Archer to see him, and the grave-faced old soldier bent kindly over the impatient and incredulous junior. "It is even as Bentley tells you, lad," said he. "Only one messenger has been able to come or go through their lines since the demoralized pair that got in from Verde, and they can't be hired to try again. We are hemmed in and helpless until our cavalry return. Willett will tell you he saw 'Tonio fire the shot that killed his horse and was meant to kill him. 'Tonio has intercepted messengers between Turner and me, and killed, I believe, at least one messenger. You must be patient or you will throw yourself into a fever and set you back a month. We've simply got to act on the defensive, guard the post and the women until relief comes. By this time, of course, General Crook himself is somewhere in the field, and any moment may

bring him; then our Apache friends, hereabouts, will have to hunt their holes."

"General Archer," said Harris, commanding himself with evident effort and striving to speak with his accustomed deliberation, "I have not seen Willett, but, if I had, I should refuse to believe that 'Tonio fired at him. The Apache-Mohaves may be with the hostiles at last, but not 'Tonio. There is some reason for his absence that we cannot fathom. They may have killed him for his loyalty to us, but loyal he is at heart, no matter how much appearances are against him."

"We'll hope so," said Archer, "but for the present, do as Bentley bids you and stay quiet," and the commander rose to go.

But Harris, too, was on his feet, steadying himself with one hand on the back of his chair. "You will pardon me, will you not, sir, if I ask a question? You say you have been unable to communicate with Stannard or Turner. Stannard is, probably, too far away, but if Turner's wounded are over on Tonto Creek, he can be reached. Have you tried signalling?"

"Signalling? We've got some flags and torches somewhere, but I believe that——"

"I don't mean that, sir. No one with Turner would understand if we had. I mean smoke signals—Indian."

"No," said Archer slowly. "No one but Indians could say what they meant, even if any one here knew their confounded code. Do you?"

"I know enough at least to call 'Tonio; and unless he is dead or spirited away, he'll answer. Then we can get word to Turner."

Archer turned back. He was almost at the door. "Do you mean he *would* answer—that he would come in here?"

"If I may give my word that no one shall touch or harm him, he'll come—if alive and able."

For a moment the general was silent. It was a grave question. In his eyes and those of his officers, 'Tonio stood attainted practically with treason. He had deserted in face of the enemy, joined forces with the enemy, shot as an enemy, conspired and acted as an enemy. He deserved to be hunted and shot down without trial, without mercy. Yet here was this young soldier, who had known him best and longest, full of boundless faith in him, demanding safe conduct for him on the honor of an officer and gentleman. If Archer gave his word it would be flying in the face of his entire command—what there was left of it, at least—and Archer's word was a thing not to be lightly given. "I must think of this awhile," said he. "It is a big proposition. You think *you* can reach him?"

"By night or day, sir, either; but it would have to be from the top of Squadron Peak."

It was then late on Friday afternoon, the fifth day of what might be called the siege. Not a signal had come from without, not a sign from either command, not a symptom of surrounding Indian; yet a little party sent to search the rookery down stream, where Case declared he'd been entertaining the ghost of 'Patchie Sanchez, came back reporting that fresh moccasin and mule tracks were plainly visible about the premises and at the neighboring ford, also that the mule tracks led away back

of the Picacho, as everybody persisted in calling the peak—in spite of the fact that from the north it presented no sharp point to the skies, but rather a bold and rounded poll. Squadron Peak was more "sonorous and appropriate," said the trooper who so named it, but, now that troopers were scarce at Almy, there were none to do it that reverence.

Old Sanchez—José—the former proprietor, had disappeared entirely, he and his brace of henchmen, after somewhere digging a treasure pit in the sand and therein "caching" their store of mescal, aguardiente, and certain other illicit valuables. It was conjectured that he had fled to the Verde Valley and taken refuge at McDowell until the storm blew over. But Craney was more than curious as to Case's guest, the ghost, and by Friday Case was sober and solemn and sick enough to be cross-questioned without show of resentment. Craney went so far as to ask Case wouldn't he like a little whiskey to steady his nerves—a cocktail to aid his appetite and stir his stomach? "Like it," said Case, "you bet I would—which is why I won't take it. Three days' liquor, two days' taper, one day suffer, then the water wagon for a spell. Thank you all the same, Mr. Craney. What can I do for you without the drink?"

But when Craney mentioned Sanchez, the ghost and the drinking bout by night at the rookery, Case said he must have been nigher to jimjams than he'd got in a year. "I never saw any ghost," said he, and Craney had to give it up, and report his failure to the commanding officer.

"Ever try threatening him with discharge?" asked Bucketts, by way of being helpful.

"Ever try? I don't *have* to try! The one time I started in on that lay he never let me finish; said all right, he'd go just as soon as he'd balanced the books. Then, by gad, it was all I could do to get him to stay. He is the most independent damn man I ever met. Says he knows he's a drunkard and nuisance one week out of four, and don't wonder I want to discharge him. Discharge him? I couldn't get along without him! Any time he wants a better job and plenty of society all he's got to do is go to Prescott. Discharge him! All I'm afraid of is he'll discharge himself!"

So Bucketts dropped the subject and he and Strong went to report non-success to Archer just as the sun was going down and the peak, in lone grandeur, loomed up dazzling above the black drapery about its base, and Bonner, pacing up and down with his much-honored chief, saw the gloom deepen in his deep-set eyes. Only Lilian seemed able to win a smile from him, as she came and took him by the arm and led him away to dinner.

Darkness settled down apace. The moon rose late and the stars were holding high carnival in consequence, for the skies were gorgeous in their deck of gold. Mrs. Stannard was dining with the Archers *en famille,* as she did now almost every evening, for the Archers would so have it, and Archer had been talking of Harris's proposition, and his determined stand for 'Tonio. Mrs. Archer shook her pretty head in negation. She could not see how any one who distrusted her general could him-

self be loyal. She had said the same of Secretary Stanton during the war, for one of that iron master's most masterly convictions was that every soldier, Southern born—even such as Thomas—must of necessity be a Southern sympathizer. 'Tonio must needs be a traitor since he avoided sight of, or speech with, her soldier who could do no wrong. And if Mrs. Archer believed in 'Tonio, on her husband's account, what must have been Lilian's conviction? she who had both father and lover—father and the husband soon to be, for of that Mrs. Archer had now no earthly doubt—the two men beyond all others combined who were dearest to Lilian on earth, both of them inimical to 'Tonio, one of them wellnigh his victim. It was Mrs. Stannard who listened in silence. She had longer known the Apache-Mohave, and as between 'Tonio and Willett it might well be a story with two sides.

They had finished their coffee and were just coming forth upon the veranda into the exquisite evening air, and, as bidden by her father, Lilian had just begun to tune her guitar, when across the parade among the men seated along the low front of the barracks there was sudden start, sudden rush, and, from up the line of officers' quarters not many doors away, came agonized cry for help. Archer sprang to his feet and started, but Mrs. Archer, in a paroxysm of fear, thinking only of Indians and treachery, seized him by the arm, clung to and held him. Mrs. Stannard sprang within the hall and back with Archer's revolver which, without a word, she thrust into his hand. Then all three together started, for while fifty men came tearing headlong

across the sandy level, making straight for the adjutant's quarters, Lilian, their little Lilian—the silent, sad-eyed, anxious child of the days and days gone by—heading everybody, was flying like a white-winged bird, straight along the line, and when the father reached her she had thrown herself upon a heap of burning, smouldering bedding, thrashing it with a wet blanket snatched from the olla, and then, with her own fair, white hands, was beating out the few sparks that remained about the sleeve and shoulder of a soaked and dishevelled gown, and brushing others from the hair and face of an unheroic, swathed and dripping figure—Harold Willett in the midst of the wreck of his cot, while Blitz, the striker, aided by Wettstein and the doctor's man, were stamping and swearing and tearing things to bits in the effort to down other incipient blazes. Between them they had dragged Willett from the midst of the flames and drenched him with a cataract from the olla. The rush of the men from the barracks made short work of the fire, but when Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard, with throbbing hearts, bent over the scorched and smoking ruin on the south porch, a tousled brown head, with ghastly face, was clasped in Lilian's arms, pillowed on Lilian's fair, white bosom. Willett had fainted from fright, pain and reaction, and the unheroic, untried, unfearing girl had blistered her own fair hands, her own soft, rounded, clasping arms, yet saw and felt nothing but dread for his suffering and joy for his safety. Even the mother for a moment could not take her rescued darling from that fond, fearless, impassioned embrace. All in that desperate in-

stant the veil of virgin shame had burned away. In the fierce heat and shock and peril the latent love force had burst its bonds, the budding lily had blossomed into womanhood.

And upon that picture, pallid, weak and suffering, another neighbor, another pain-stricken young soldier gazed in silence, then turned unobtrusively away. There was no one to help him back to the reclining chair from which he had been startled at the almost frenzied shriek of alarm. There was no further talk—no thought of signals that night; Archer had had enough of fire. They bore the reviving officer, presently, to a vacant room in Stannard's quarters, and Lilian was led to her own. There were bandages about both hands and arms when next morning she appeared upon the gallery. They hid the red ravages on the fair, white skin, but what was there to veil the radiant light that shone in her eyes, the burning blushes that mantled her soft and rounded cheeks? Archer took her to his heart and kissed her and turned to his duty with a sigh. Mrs. Archer clung to and hovered about her, silent, for what was there to say? Mrs. Stannard came over, all smiles and sunshine, to announce that "He" had passed a comfortable night, and "His" first waking thoughts and words were for her, as indeed they should have been, and, so far as audible words were concerned, they possibly were. What else could Mrs. Stannard have said when she saw that winsome, yet appealing little face?

And in such wise was our Lilian wooed; in such wise was she won. Contrary to Bentley's wishes, Willett had essayed to smoke, and so set his bed afire. Contrary to

all convention, the love of the maiden had been the first to manifest itself to public eye, but Willett manfully rose to the occasion. In the midst of anxiety, uncertainty and danger there beamed one ray, at least, of radiant, unshadowed, buoyant hope and bliss and shy delight. Lilian Archer envied no girl on the face of the globe, no white-robed seraph in heaven; and for her sake others, too, strove hard to hope, to help, to shower good wishes and congratulation.

"But to think of my little girl in love," said Archer, with brimming eyes. "Why, you—you won't be nineteen!"

"And mother was but seventeen when she married you," softly laughed Lilian, snuggling to his side.

"And Mr. Willett so far from his captaincy," sighed her mother.

"Much nearer than father was to even a first lieutenancy when you married him," was the joyous answer. "*He* was only a second lieutenant by brevet."

"Well," said Mrs. Archer, "it seems different—somehow."

And so it seemed to us. "All too brief a wooing," said poor Archer. "God send her longer wedded bliss!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Moreover, as some one said in speaking of the sudden engagement, "It came about on a Friday evening, didn't it?" And then, too, when people were talking it over a few weeks later, as Mrs. Archer said, "it seemed different." Soldier folk sometimes have superstitions as surely as the sailor man is never without his, and a start on a voyage of love life, clearing port of a Friday evening, had its inauspicious side. But for the mishap that suddenly enveloped the happy man in flames at a moment when he was sprawled on his back with his whole right side, as it were, in a sling, Mr. Harold Willett might indeed have returned to duty and department headquarters with no other encumbrance than a mortgaged pay account, and it was not fair to Lilian to speak of her engagement as "announced" that Friday evening; but in her wondrous happiness she could find no fault with anything about it. It was all just perfect, just heavenly (where they neither give nor are given in marriage, which possibly accounts, as said our cynic, for so much that is heavenly about it). As an engagement, in fact, it did not exist until four days later, after other and equally important things had occurred, and we have merely taken Lilian's point of view, and left them out of that chapter and all consideration, as she did, so far as we are concerned, in

order to have it all over and done with. But of course there had to be time for Willett to recover from the effects of the shock, to be clothed in his right mind and something less fragmentary than the relics of a *robe de nuit,* and a day in which to realize what had taken place. (I shrewdly suspect that our good friend Mrs. Stannard saw to it that Mr. Willett was informed of what Lilian had done and suffered on his account, if she did not dilate on what Lilian had betrayed.) And then came his very properly worded plea to be allowed to see her and thank her; and when there was equally proper demur on Mrs. Archer's part, Willett made his avowal in what even the mother held to be manly and convincing fashion, for, now that she knew that her darling's heart was gone—that it was too late to avert the inevitable—mother-like, she strove to see with her darling's eyes all that was good in him, and there was so *very* much that was good-looking. She never even hinted to her husband, much less to Lilian, that she had heard the paragon most vehemently accused of most unmanly and unbecoming conduct (for what was Mr. Case, after all, but an irresponsible inebriate?), and she saw that her daughter's happiness was wrapped up in this brilliant and most presentable young soldier. Willett certainly gave many a promise of eminence in his career and profession, so she set herself at once to work to talk the general into complaisance, and he, who loved her with all his heart, and believed her the best, the bravest, fondest, truest wife in all the army (as indeed she might have been without being the wisest), and who could deny Lilian nothing from the

time she turned his best silken sash into a swing for herself and Wauwataycha Two Bears, her tiny Sioux playmate, till now that she had set her heart on one Harold Willett for a husband, broke down and surrendered as ordered. But there was that in the old soldier's face as he took Willett's hand that made the junior wince more than did the grip, which was mild enough. "She will be just such another wife as is her blessed mother," said Archer. "Be good and true to her, Willett."

"I will, so help me God!" said Willett solemnly, and then, at least, he meant it.

There had been an awkward little conference, an impromptu affair, at the mess the morning after the alarm of fire. Willett stock had been running down before that episode, and went "plumb out of sight" for several hours. It was held by Bonner, Bucketts, Briggs and Strong a most womanish thing on his part to have raised such a row and then "wilted." It was Bentley, the most disgusted man at the post, who now came to the rescue. "He was dumped on the porch like a sack of potatoes," said he, "and probably suffered exquisite pain, let alone the burns and the shock." Then, bunglingly, as bachelors will, and bachelors two of them were, they began to talk of the revelation that met their eyes and what it portended. No one, as yet, had told "the Old Man" of Willett's night at the store, and now no man would do it. Bygones were bygones. Willett would be up in a week or so, the better, perhaps, for enforced rest and abstinence, and now, of course, there could and would be no more of—of that

sort of thing, and all his better traits would shine by contrast with his probably temporary lapse into frivolity. Even then, however, they wondered what Harris would think, and speculated as to what he would say. Bucketts had not guessed amiss when he said there was no love lost between the classmates. Bucketts, and all, had seen how much both the young men had been attracted by Lilian's grace and beauty, and the sweet, girlish freshness that proved such a charm. Bucketts, and all, had been in, as usual, to see Harris, and found him, as he said, a trifle set back by the excitement, and therefore rather more grave and quiet even than usual, but they said no word of Lilian and—possibilities. He knew. Strong had seen him when he came, and looked, and stood inert one moment there, unable to be of use, and had turned slowly back to his room under Bentley's roof. Everybody knew it could not be more than a day or two before the affair would be announced as an engagement, and while every man felt that Willett had won a prize far beyond his deserts, there was not one that felt like tendering congratulation.

But, as we said, there were other and important matters to claim the attention of the garrison, and just an hour before sunset that evening came the first. Case's week was up, and, sharp on time at noon on Saturday, Case came forth from his room, tubbed, trimmed and shaved, went silently to his desk and then turned to Mr. Craney to ask what had become of the mail.

"Nary mail," said Craney. "Not a cuss got in or out for over a week."

"Didn't Sanchez bring—anything from Prescott?"

"Nothing but his ghost has even been heard of. You told of that."

"I? Do you mean he hasn't been here—hasn't told you what's happened?" And Case's eyes were looking wild again.

"What *has* happened, Case? By gad, if you know, out with it, for no mother's son of us here has heard a thing for a week, and Sanchez has never set foot on the post."

"Then send for Mr. Strong, quick," said Case, sinking into a chair, the sweat of weakness and distress of mind showing instantly on his brow, rare symptom in Arizona. And then, while somebody ran up to the post to summon the adjutant, Case, pressing his hands to his head, began striding up and down the low-ceilinged, half-darkened room. "Wait," he said, as Craney and Watts, excited and anxious, would have pressed him to begin. "Wait. Give me just three fingers," and the whiskey was handed forthwith. He downed it in two gulps, and presently the color began to come back to his cheeks, and then Strong came hurrying in. "Is Mr. Harris still here?—and that other specimen—Mr. Willett?" Case demanded on the instant. "That's well, anyhow! And the cavalry still out? That's bad. We want 'em here, *here,* I tell you, and quick, too! Gentlemen, this is no cock-and-bull story. There's enough Apaches back of us here in the Mazatzal to head off everybody from Prescott or McDowell. They've killed three parties—a dozen soldiers, perhaps—already, and they've cut off Prescott and Date Creek and Sandy, and murdered every courier that tried to

get through. They headed off and killed the runners sent to find General Crook and give him the news, but worse than all, they've been down here begging the Sierra Blancas, and the bands of Deltchay and Eskiminzin—nearly eight hundred they'd make—to come up here and get between Turner and the post, eat him up in the cañons—he's had a lot killed and wounded already—and then turn on us. How do I *know* it?" he demanded, in the midst of his excited harangue. "Sanchez told me—'Patchie Sanchez, the runner, last night. No—night before, or *some* night. Right here, I thought; right here where you all heard! He said they'd ordered him ironed in Prescott for telling the truth, and he said the sergeant had orders to flog him with a bull-whip, and he killed the man that tried to flog him. You mean you didn't hear this? You didn't know it? You didn't see him?—that I've been dreaming as well as drunk? By God, drunk or dreaming, it's so! and that's why José Sanchez and the others lit out for McDowell! They were afraid to stay. 'Patchie says Deltchay and Skim are coming, sure, whether the Sierra Blancas join or not. All the cavalry are up on the Black Mesa 'cept Turner's troop, and now's their turn. Call me drunk, crazy, mad, *anything* you like, but tell the general what I say! Tell him to get ready to fight like hell!"

And so it would seem Case, the bookkeeper, had "inside information," and so it happened that, within an hour after sunset, once again the gray-haired commander and the wounded subaltern were in conference, and Case's strange story was told in full. "There's

"Keep watch now all around, especially east and southeast."
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more than enough in it to demand our warning Turner," said Harris. "Can you get me up to Squadron Peak —to-night?"

Just at tattoo the old-fashioned, yellow ambulance, drawn by a brace of mules, backed up at Bentley's quarters, and Harris was carefully lifted aboard. The general, with Strong and Bonner, stood at hand to say godspeed. "Promise him safe conduct," said the commander, as they drove away, and Harris touched his hat in acknowledgment. Briggs, with twenty stout foot soldiers, awaited them at the abandoned ranch. The doctor and two attendants accompanied him. The road for nearly four miles lay along the sandy flats, then went boring westward into the foothills, while a little worn branch turned off to the peak. Two-thirds of the way to the top the mules were able to pull the jolting vehicle, and from thence half a dozen brawny arms bore the young soldier on a stretcher to the summit. It was then after eleven, and the moon still behind the Mogollon, lowering black against the silvering skies full forty miles to the eastward. Already there was sufficient light to guide them, and a sergeant led on to a point where, surrounded by knee-high rocks, was a little blackened space where in bygone days many a signal fire had blazed, and here the men tossed the tinder, the pine cones and dead branches they had gathered on the climb. A match was applied. All crouched or stooped among the rocks, as the flames presently leaped on high, and gave ear to the quiet orders of the young soldier, practically in command. "Keep watch now, all round, especially east and south-east. It may be ten minutes

before you get an answer, and there *may* come a dozen. More fuel may be needed," whereat half a dozen dark forms silently backed away down the slope, and all men waited and watched. Harris, with one arm and shoulder still bandaged, and obviously weak, sat grasping at the corner a folded blanket and busily coaching Briggs, who listened, absorbed. Ten, twelve, fourteen the minutes rolled by. The silvery sheen spread higher over the eastward sky. The crest of the distant Mesa was just fringing with dazzling white, when two voices at once exclaimed: "There you are, sir!" And afar over to the south-east, the direction of Tonto Creek, a little ruddy spark appeared through the gloom, and a moment later still another was made out, farther to the left. In twenty minutes three were in sight. "Anywhere from fifteen to twenty miles away," said Harris, as he studied them with the signal glass, "and," he continued, "I looked for one much nearer."

"There you have it, sir!" And almost opposite them, it seemed, and lower, straight away to the east, so near they could almost mark the waving of the flame, a fourth blaze burst into view.

"That's more like it!" said Harris. "Now the blanket. Give me a boost, corporal," and with that, supported by the strong arm of one of the soldiers, he stepped upon the nearest rock, the blanket in his left hand. Briggs grabbed the opposite corner with his right, and the next moment a woollen curtain swung flat between the fires.

"Now, Briggs, up!" and the hidden red eye was suddenly unmasked and glared out over the east.

"Down!" and all toward the opposite fire was darkness again. Twice more was it raised and lowered. Then a five seconds' pause. Then twice again. "Thirty-two," said Harris. "'Tonio's old signal. Now watch for the answers!" From those at a distance there came no sign. The flare at each was steady. From the nearmost, almost instantly, came the desired response. It suddenly disappeared, and Harris, at second intervals, counted low, "One, two, three." Then came the red glow again, just a moment. Then darkness only for two seconds. Then light again. "It is 'Tonio," said he, "and that's his call to me. Now, Briggs, again! Slowly this time!"

And very slowly was the blanket raised and lowered twice. Then came two or three quicker movements. Then the blaze spoke untrammelled, and all eyes were on 'Tonio's torch, and they who had heard ill of him—had doubted him—found themselves oddly drawn to him across the intervening miles of darkness. Twice, thrice slowly his light, too, was curtained. Then for a moment it burned clearer; then seemed suddenly to sputter out. Within a few seconds, far more swiftly than it rose, the signal fire vanished from sight, and Harris stepped quietly down. "That's all," said he, yet the doctor, at least, could read the suppressed exultation in his tone. Then, seeing inquiry and disappointment, both, in the eager eyes about him, the young officer added, "He understands. He's coming, or sending, in."

"Did you promise him safe conduct?" asked Bentley.

"He did not ask it," was the answer.

Two hours later, once more safe at the post, the doctor had stowed his weary patient in bed, renewed the dressing and bandages, and was bidding him try to sleep, but Harris smiled. "You'll need me to translate," said he. "The general's message to Turner is being written now. Let us finish this while we're about it."

Sure enough. Toward half-past one the sentries on Numbers Six and Seven set up a shout for the corporal of the guard, and an Indian girl, trembling a bit, was led to the office, and half the garrison knew that word was in from 'Tonio. The general took his messenger kindly by the hand. Food and chocolate were in readiness at the Mess, but she shook her head. "Capitan Chiquito," she insisted, and then was conducted up the line, and, shrinking not a little, was led into the doctor's quarters. There, at sight of Harris, she instantly stepped to his bedside, knelt, and taking his weary hand, placed it on her head. He whom 'Tonio held in reverence, his followers could but blindly obey.

To his question in her own tongue, "Where is 'Tonio?" she answered, "Toward the moon, now two hands high. When it is straight above Pancha can reach him again." "Is 'Tonio well?" "'Tonio is well, but—others brought Pancha. They say they are afraid that soldiers shoot. They await Pancha's returning."

Evidently, despite the kindness in every face, the girl still feared the white man and wished to be gone. "He has sent her, general," said Harris. "Whatever

you wish to send now to Turner will go through, if 'Tonio is not killed in the attempt."

And so, with unexpected burden of food and gifts and with a brief despatch to Turner, bidding him hasten with his entire force, the dusky, fleet-footed daughter of the mountain was led back to the stream, went bounding lightly across from stone to stone, and disappeared among the shadows toward the east.

"And now," said Harris, "Deltchay and Skiminzin may come as soon as they like. Turner will get here in time, and then—you may judge as to 'Tonio."

And this was Saturday night, or rather Sunday morning, not yet one full week since Willett was brought in swearing he saw 'Tonio take deliberate aim at him, although only the horse was shot, and as matters stood in the gross and scope of garrison understanding, the weight of presumptive evidence was against the Apache, and there was more to come.

CHAPTER XVII.

As was to be expected, Lieutenant Harris was somewhat worse when time came for inspection Sunday morning, but Bentley said complete rest would soon restore him. The other interesting invalid, Lieutenant Willett, was correspondingly better, and was to sit up awhile later in the day. Inspection was held under arms and in fighting kit instead of full dress—the two companies looking like a pair of scanty platoons, so heavy was the drain for guard duty. From earliest dawn lookouts had been stationed on top of the adjutant's office at the south, and the hospital at the north edge of the parade, Bucketts having built for them a little wooden platform, with bench, shelf and sunshade, and there, with signal-service glasses, they scoured the barren wilds in every direction for sign of coming friend or foe.

It was eleven o'clock when Bentley came forth with Mrs. Stannard from his morning visit to Willett. "Oh, he's doing as well as an overfed, under-trained animal has any right to," said he, in response to the inquiry in her soft blue eyes. "I still think some men have too much luck in this world of ours. Here's Willett, who doesn't begin to deserve it, getting everything that is good, and Harris, who deserves all the good that the army affords, gets all the hard knocks and setbacks.

Here's Willett swearing that 'Tonio's a renegade, hostile, spy and a traitor, and Harris convinced that he is stanch and loyal—that Willett must be mistaken in saying he shot at him, and though everything I know of the Apaches or ever heard, and every bit of evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of Willett's statement, just from what I've seen of these two men I'm deciding with Harris."

"You don't—feel confidence in Mr. Willett's—judgment?" she asked.

For a moment he hesitated, then turned and squarely faced her. "I don't feel confidence in Mr. Willett. There, Mrs. Stannard! There are not ten women in the army to whom I'd trust myself to speak of this—or five women out of it—but I am not happy over the way things are going."

"Don't you think he'll—learn to appreciate her?"

"He shouldn't *have* to learn! He should see it all at a glance, and thank God for the unmerited blessing."

"Perhaps he does," said she, ever gentle, helpful, hopeful. "It is lovely the way he speaks to her—and I'm quite eager to see them this afternoon."

What woman would not be? What man would not have been at his best at such a time, under such circumstances? The realization that he had won the fervent love of that fresh, pure, exquisite young heart was enough to thrill even a nature so utterly selfish as Willett's. It is the shallowest soul that most readily thrills, and what could be sweeter than the shy, yet rapturous love in the downcast eyes of Lilian Archer, when, as he had implored her mother, she was led that after-

noon to the darkened room in which he sat, and, like knight of old, he took and bent over and kissed her trembling little hand. "I would kneel, too," he murmured, even as her mother stood beside her, with swimming eyes, and as he looked up into the blushing face his own eyes were filled with unfeigned homage, admiration, even love, his deep voice with emotion that was sweet to woman's ear. "Heaven never made a lovelier lover than Hal Willett," once said a famous belle and beauty. "That's why so many of us like to listen."

But these earnest, honest, inexperienced two—the whole-hearted army wife who had lived well-nigh quarter of a century in the undivided sunshine of an honest soldier's love, and this sweet, simple-hearted army girl who had never dreamed of or thought to know any love to compare with this—listened, spellbound, to Willett's almost eloquent avowal, and the last doubt or fear that Mrs. Archer entertained vanished like the morning mists before the sunshine.

"I declare," she said to Mrs. Stannard, "I'm almost as much in love as Lilian," and indeed it seemed so, and might well be so, for never was queen's courtier so exquisite in deference, homage, tact, as, in that blissful week of honeymooning, was Hal Willett to the mother of his dainty love. As for Lilian, the arid, breezeless day was soft with scented zephyrs; the unpeopled air was athrill with the melody of countless song birds; the unsightly desert flowered with exquisite millions of buds and blossoms that craved the caress of her dainty hand, the pressure of her pretty foot. The

sunburned square of the lonely little garrison, environed with swarthy foemen, cut off from the world, was alive with heroic knights in glittering armor and ladies in lace and loveliness, and all were her loyal, devoted subjects, revelling in her happiness, rejoicing in her smiles, serving her in homage and on bended knee, their thrice-blessed, beautiful, beloved queen. God never made a more radiantly happy girl than was our fairy Lilian that wonderful week. God be thanked it was so utterly blissful, since it had to be so brief!

All day long the watchmen clung to their glaring stations, and Sunday went by without either alarm or excursion. All Sunday—Monday night, they scanned the dark depths of eastward basin, the lone reaches of the valley, the tumbling heights to the west. It was nine in the morning of the second day since the signalling from Squadron Peak when the cry went up from the roof of the office, "Signal smoke south-east!" and every glass at Almy was brought to bear within the minute, and half the garrison lined the lower edge of the mesa, and all men were listening for further tidings, when from the hospital came the stirring shout: "Smoke answer, west! And there, plainly visible, and not five miles away among the pine-bearded foothills, in little puffs, singly and distinct, thick wreaths of gray-white smoke were sailing straight aloft. The waiting Apache of the Mazatzal was signalling the coming brother from the dark clefts of the Sierra Ancha. One hour later, just as ten was striking on the spiral of the office clock, two sudden shots were heard on the flats to the north-west, and the little herd of horses and mules,

not two dozen in all, grazing under cover of the rifles of Sentries 3 and 4, came limping, lumbering in, fast as hoppled feet would permit and without sign of a herdsman. Number Three, a veteran of the war days, let drive with his fifty calibre Springfield, the gun of the day, and sent up a yell for "The Guard!"

"Join your companies, men," said the general, in his placid way, whereat most of them went with a rush. "The north side first, Bonner," he added, as the captain came hurrying to his chief. "They've sneaked up on the herd guard, I fancy. Send the picked shots out to the pits."

Out on the flats to the west of the Verde road, full five hundred yards away from rock, tree or shelter, other than mere clump of cactus, pumpkin size, or bunch of dirty weed, there was lying a little heap of dingy white and brown, with a cow pony kicking at empty air in a shallow ditch—what was left of the half-breed herd guard and his mount. With most of the cavalry gone, the quartermaster had supplied their place with such mounted men as he could make available, and in broad daylight, within long rifle-shot of the sentry lines, the Apaches had squirmed out, snake-like, on their bellies, unseen, unsuspected; had picked off one of two watchers and stampeded the other. The skirmish line stumbled over the survivor, quaking among the willows in the stream bed, and kicked him out into the open to help bear home his murdered brother; then pushed out as far as the first ridge in hopes of a shot, and were rewarded with nothing better than a glimpse of vanishing breech-clouts. Falling slowly back, toward

noon, Bonner posted two men in each of a dozen rifle-pits, some fifty yards outside the sentry lines, as a rule, and wherever view of the approaches could be had. Two of these were on little knolls to the south of the store, and here were Craney & Co. in full force, every man armed with a Henry rifle and a war-model Colt, "Mr. Case-Keeper Book," as Sergeant Clancy jovially hailed him, quite as formidable as his fellows, and every whit as cool. Craney held that he and his men had a right to be counted in among those told off to hold the fort, and Bonner smilingly assented.

"You two seem to hit it off pretty well together," said he to Case and Clancy. "I reckon we'll Cossack you over yonder," and he pointed to a scooped-out little hummock nearest the stream, commanding much of the southward road and the trail along the willows, now facetiously termed the "Ghost Walk." It was an unusual assignment, or distribution, but it seemed to strike the fancy of both. In times of peril and at the fore-posts men think less of rank and more of repute. Clancy was known far and wide as a fearless Apache fighter, with a Gaines's Mill-Gettysburg record behind him. Case had never before been heard of afield, but his one exploit in the card room stamped him unerringly, said these frontier experts, as "a man of nerve." Clancy held out his big red hand. "Are ye with me?" said he. "Yours truly," said Case. "Then come on, Pitkeeper," said Clancy, "and we'll leave Book and Case behind."

The general came jogging down at the moment, bestriding one of Bucketts's general utility beasts, watch-

ing the posting of the post defenders, and he screwed his eyelids down to a slit as he glared from under the brim of his then unorthodox slouch hat, and squinted after the combination of soldier and civilian stalking away to the assigned station. "What have you there, Bonner?" he asked, as he reined in.

"'Erin go unum, E pluribus bragh,' sir, as Derby would have it." "The Celt and the Casekeeper," he added to himself. "Clancy and Case going gunning together as amicably as if they had never squabbled over a sutler's bill."

"Queer lot—that man Case!" said the commanding officer reflectively. "His face bothers me sometimes, as though I must have seen or known him before, yet he tells me that he did not come to Vancouver until after I had left that department. Is he all straight again?"

"Straight as the new toadsticker, general, and"—with a rueful look at that slender appendage—"a damned sight more useful. His ghost-herding spree was no end important. I've an idea Case can handle a gun as well as"—another *sotto voce* now—"he can play a worthless hand."

"Well," said Archer, as he glanced about him, "I don't believe, as a rule, in putting any but soldiers on post, but," as he considered the slender rank of infantry standing patiently at ease, barely a dozen all told, and then smiled at Craney and his belligerent force, only four in number, but each man a walking arsenal with two weapons and five shots to the soldiers' one, "there are no non-combatants in Indian warfare. Every man, woman and child may have to fight."

Yet Archer felt no measure whatever of apprehension. One hundred good men and true, at least, were left to guard the post, and many of them battle-tried veterans. Not since the war days had the Apaches mustered in sufficient force and daring to attack a garrison. Still, Archer knew that if they only realized their strength in point of numbers, their skill in creeping close to their prey, their swiftness of foot, and the ease with which they could escape, all they needed was dash, determination and a leader, to enable them to creep upon the post in the darkness, and in one terrific moment swoop upon the officers' quarters, massacre every soul, and be off across the stream before the men in the barracks could rush to the rescue. They had talked it over at officers' mess—the general and Bonner and Bucketts and all, and figured out just how fifty white desperadoes could plan and accomplish the feat. It would be no trick at all to come up the valley in the screen of the willows, creep to the west bank, divide into six different squads, one for each set of quarters, crawl to the post of the drowsy sentry, shoot him full of arrows before he could cry out or load, then, all together, charge up the slope and into the flimsy houses, pistols in hand and knives in their teeth, and simply butcher the occupants as they lay in their beds. Doors, even if closed or bolted, which rarely happened, could be smashed in an instant—matches would light their way. It would be all over in much less time than it takes to tell it, and it might well happen but for two things—the Apache's dread of the dark and his fear of a possible hand-to-hand fight.

Yet if Deltchay and Eskiminzin, with all their warriors, were to reënforce these about them, with five hundred braves to the garrison's one hundred, even that dread might be overcome.

And by Monday's sundown it was known that numbers of Apaches had crossed the valley ten miles away to the south—the telescope had told that—and not a word or sign had been vouchsafed by Turner, and Tuesday brought no better news. Then 'Tonio, said many a man, had played them false.

Just at four o'clock Archer had arranged the dispositions for the night. Mrs. Stannard, with Mrs. Archer and Lilian, were to occupy the ground floor, north-west, room of his quarters—the one least exposed to flying bullets in case of attack. Mrs. Bennett and the matron were moved into a little room in the hospital. The soldiers' wives and children were to assemble in the barracks in case of alarm. The men in the outlying posts and pits were to be doubled at dusk —Bonner's company attending to that, while Briggs and his fellows were to sleep on their arms within the post. It now lacked but a few minutes of sunset. No further demonstration had occurred. Not an Indian had been seen within a radius of six miles, when, all on a sudden, there came a shot—then two, almost together, then a quick crackle and sputter of small-arms afar down the stream. "By Jove!" cried Bonner, from a perch by the lookout at the office. "They've opened on Case and Clancy!"

And that was but the opening, for within a minute, from on every side, from far out among the rocks to the

"They've opened on Case and Clancy."

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DO NOT
REMOVE

west, from the sandhills across the stream, from little heaps of brush and weed and cactus in the flats, from the distant screen of the willows in the stream bed, little puffs of white sulphur smoke jutted into the slanting sunshine, and the pulseless air of declining day was suddenly set to stir and throb by the crackle of encircling musketry. And then was seen the wisdom of the veteran's defence. Few of the hostiles, as yet, had other than old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifles, and few that they owned were effective over six hundred yards. By stationing his better shots in rifle pits well forward from the buildings on every side, Archer easily held the foe at a distance so long as they dare not "rush" his outposts. Only on the east side were there pits less than three hundred yards from the mesa, but here there was a dismal flat beyond the creek, affording a minimum of cover, and hardly a bullet whistled in from any direction so as to reach the quarters. Once in a while a little puff of dust flew up from the sandy slope without, but even that was enough to demand that the women folk should keep under shelter, and at the moment the firing began Lilian and her mother were seated by Willett's reclining chair, and then Mrs. Stannard joined them, and, the windows being shaded, they never saw, among the first to reach the general at the mesa edge, Harris, the wounded officer, revolver in his unfettered hand.

The first volleying over, only in single and scattered shots, as they reloaded, came the Indian fire. If the hope had been to strike dismay with a volume of sound such as native ears had not heard, the Apache was

doomed to disappointment. Men who had heard the crash of Spottsylvania and Cold Harbor laughed at the puny crackle of two hundred muskets. Then presently the Springfields began deliberate reply, only an occasional shot, for only very rarely did so much as the tip of a turban appear, and then the sun had dropped below the Mazatzal and the valley was in shadow, and old Archer stood with grim, whimsical smile on his weather-beaten face, as, field-glass to his eyes, he scanned his outposts at the south where the firing seemed heaviest. It was a moment or two before he noticed Harris at all. When he did it was to utter a mild rebuke. "You should not be here, lad. You need rest. This is only fun."

Yet not all fun. Strong came presently thumping back from beyond the store. He had borrowed Craney's Pinto pony and had been visiting the southward posts, and Pinto had been clipped by a bullet and was half frantic with the smart and scare combined. Moreover, Strong's fighting face was red and mad, as he thrashed the lagging pony up the slope.

"It's Deltchay, sir, easy enough," said he, with sweeping salute, "and that isn't all"—this with almost challenging glance at Harris, who had dropped his pistol and was gazing intently through his binocular at an open, slanting space far out to the south-east, still blazing in the rays of the setting sun. "The man of all others that oughtn't to be there stood at that point of rocks not ten minutes ago—the man we sent for Turner, general—'Tonio himself!"

Then both men, the gray-mustached commander, the

angering adjutant, turned on the silent little subaltern, who stood there without having so much as changed his attitude or lowered his glass.

"You hear that, Harris?" demanded Archer. And with calm respect, yet almost exasperating drawl, came the unlooked-for answer:

"I was about to mention it—myself, sir. 'Tonio was certainly there—and Turner close behind him. Look for yourself, sir!"

Look, indeed! Riding steadily down into the valley, still a long four miles away, came the extended line of half a cavalry troop in skirmish order, with the supports and reserves dotting the slope to their rear. "Turner, as sure as shooting," said the general —"and 'Tonio as his guide!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The attack had ended almost as suddenly as it began. Darkness descended upon the valley and every vestige of the Apache was gone with the twilight. Long before time for tattoo the eager watchers in the down-stream posts could hear muffled hoofbeats and low-toned words of command along the still cautious skirmish line, and Turner came but slowly, first because he could see that there was no occasion for hurry; second, because, with his wounded to protect, there was every objection to haste. Between that steadily advancing array and these fire-spitting heaps of sand toward the post the Indians slid soundless away into the gloom of the foothills, and presently shouts of greeting and welcome reechoed among the rocks, and Turner's men rode sturdily up to the fords. By ten the last litter had been shouldered through the swift waters and borne to the ready hospital, where Bentley and his assistants went busily to work. Six of the men and two Hualpai scouts had been more or less severely wounded, four of them being borne from Tonto Creek on improvised stretchers made from saplings and blankets. Shelter tents, or tentage of any kind, our men had no use for, save as sunshades, in Arizona.

And with Turner came the first tidings to reach the beleaguered post since the couriers were brought in,

with their belated tales, from up the Verde. Turner looked a trifle surprised at the warmth of his greeting. Turner had had little idea of their being so closely invested. Turner had sent two runners in with reports, and they both returned safely, saying, "Almy all right, but plenty Tonto everywhere!" One of them said he gave his despatch to 'Tonio, as he dare go no farther. One of them brought his back with him, and the third—Hualpai 21, he supposed—had finally reached the post, as only two nights since an Apache-Mohave boy found his way to the Tonto Creek camp with the despatch recalling the cavalry. They started at dawn, wounded and all; had a long range fight with Tontos toward evening, and another next morning, but forged slowly and steadily ahead with only slight loss, and came in sight of the flag and the fracas late the second afternoon. Turner was glad to get back, he said, since it seems he was needed, but was no sooner back than he was eager to launch out again. Hadn't they heard? Why, there had been great doings up on the Mogollon. Old Gray Fox himself had taken the field and was out with all the horsemen from Whipple and Sandy, and Stannard had joined them, and they were ripping up the Tonto country in a way that bade fair to wind up the war. How had he heard? Why, *runners*—Apache-Mohaves—'Tonio's people. Kwonahelka and some of his ilk had managed to keep going between them, slipping through or skipping round the Tontos like so many "ghost goats." It was only here, round about Almy, the hostiles were too many for them!"

"D'you mean you didn't *know* the Apache-Mohaves were just as hostile as the rest?" asked Archer.

"Apache-Mohaves!" exclaimed Turner, looking up in amaze from the hot supper set for him in the mess room. "Why, general, I couldn't have got along without 'em!"

"This beats me!" said the chief, looking at the faces about him for support, and finding it in every one, for Harris had been remanded to bed. "Up here they have chased our couriers, blocked the runners, and 'Tonio himself shot at Willett and killed his horse!"

For a moment Turner was too much surprised to speak. Suddenly he called to the orderly at the doorway to send his sergeant, who was then at the adjutant's office adjoining. "I beg your pardon, general," he said, "but this seems incredible in view of our experiences. Why, some of them joined us and stayed with us day and night." Then as a bearded, sun-blistered face appeared at the doorway, and a sturdy form in hunting shirt of deerskin and long Apache leggings stood attention before them: "Sergeant, send 'Tonio here, and you come with him. You and he seem to understand each other."

"'Tonio didn't come in, sir, nor the few that were with him. They hung back and quit at the Point."

"Quit! Do you know what's the trouble?"

"No, sir." But the soldier was obviously embarrassed. "I gather, though, from what I could understand, that 'Tonio thinks he's mistrusted. He says he will not come in till Big Chief comes himself. He means General Crook, sir."

There was silence a moment. It was for the post commander to speak if anybody, and Archer sat studying the veteran trooper before him. Officers of experience knew the value of expert opinion to be had for the asking among sergeants with war records behind them, and Turner's right bower, into whose sanctum at barracks only his intimates ventured, save with cap in hand and "sir" on their lips, was a man of mark in the regiment.

"Sergeant Malloy," said Archer, "did 'Tonio tell you why he was mistrusted?"

"I think he was trying to, sir, but I am new at his language and none too good at signs."

Again did it seem as though Malloy had understood more readily than he cared to admit, or would presume to say. It was very late. The day had been long and trying. With all its matter-of-fact, nonchalant ease of manner during the few hours under fire, the personnel of Camp Almy, officer and man, had been subjected to something of a strain night and day for nearly a week, and now was ready to turn in and sleep, but Archer and those with him were convinced that in Sergeant Malloy there lived a witness who, better even than Lieutenant Harris, could throw light on 'Tonio's singular and inexplicable behavior. There was not one of their number who did not believe, and in the absence of Harris would hesitate to say, that Willett had seen 'Tonio taking deliberate aim when the shot was fired that downed both his horse and himself. This was enough to warrant their doubt of 'Tonio's loyalty. All that was lacking was something to establish a motive—

an explanation—for a murderous and treasonable deed. An unwilling witness was Sergeant Malloy, therefore the more persistent should be the examination, and after a moment's reflection Archer spoke again:

"Sergeant, you have formed an impression, I think, and I should be glad to have the benefit of it. Did—he mean that—Lieutenant Harris distrusted him?"

"No, sir." On this point the sergeant was confident.

"Did he mention any one—in particular?"

"I gathered that he thought that all the officers of the post, from the general down, with perhaps two exceptions, distrusted him."

"And these two—were?"

"Captain Stannard, sir, and Captain Turner."

"I see," said Archer gravely. "Now, had anything happened—had anything been said or done to account for his—sensitiveness, we will call it?"

Malloy hesitated. "The general understands, I hope, that I am answering only as to impressions. I might be mistaken as to his meaning, and he might have been mistaken as to the meaning of the officer in the case."

"Then there has been a case? When and where?"

There was impressive silence in the dimly lighted mess room as the impromptu council sat about the table, Turner, with the relics of his hearty supper, at the other end of it. Every man present seemed to feel that here at last the clew to 'Tonio's double dealing was to be found. The answer came readily enough:

"At Bennett's Ranch, sir, the night it was burnt."

"Why—what happened there?" And Archer was evidently surprised.

"'Tonio said he was insulted before his own people —called a liar—struck with a gauntlet."

"Struck? 'Tonio? A chief, and a son of a chief—of a line of chiefs, in fact! Why, what man could have been—mad enough to do that?"

There was just a suspicion of satire, of humor, of possible malice in the answer, yet every one familiar with the traditions and the vocabulary—the nomenclature—of the old army of the old days, knew well the sergeant was well within his rights. Respect and regret intermingled were in tone and word as in his answer, all unwittingly, Malloy furnished the missing motive for 'Tonio's crime:

"It wasn't one of the men, sir. It was Lieutenant —Lieutenant Willett."

Then for a moment there was another silence. Bonner, Briggs and Strong exchanged quick glances. Archer's fine, clear-cut face took on a deeper shade, then he turned his chair to squarely face the sergeant.

"Did he explain—how it came about?"

"'Tonio said that he wished to go, and ought to go, with Lieutenant Harris—the lieutenant was his chief. Lieutenant Willett forbade, as I understand, and ordered him to stay, and he had to get Lieutenant Harris himself to explain the order before 'Tonio would obey. Then 'Tonio says the lieutenant ordered him to do something, I could not tell what. 'Tonio answered by telling Lieutenant Willett not to step on some moccasin tracks, and the lieutenant surely couldn't have understood him, for he grew very angry and—but, indeed, general, it's more than I know that I've been telling——"

But Archer had one more question to ask, and asked it, and when it was answered the council broke up with no man dissenting from the general belief in 'Tonio's attempted, yet baffled, revenge.

"Did 'Tonio tell you of what happened later—of his attempt to shoot at Lieutenant Willett?"

"Not a word or sign of that, sir!"

And yet it was 'Tonio's people who kept the faith as to bearing messages and giving safe conduct to Archer's people in the field. It was all past Archer's comprehension and that of the officers present. There was no Gray Fox there who knew Indians as they knew themselves. There was no genial, straightforward "Big Chief Jake," the fearless soldier leader from the lower reservation, from Camp Apache and the San Carlos, the man on whom the Gray Fox leaned, the man whom the hostiles dreaded, the "friendlies" trusted, and all frontiersmen, soldier or civilian, swore by. They could have fathomed it. Even blunt old Stannard, had he been there, could have thrown some needed light on the vexed and gloomy question. But in all Camp 'Almy that night there was only one officer who, knowing few of these facts, nevertheless knew 'Tonio so well, and so repented him of his own brief suspicion, that he would have called a halt to the order given Captain Turner within the hour—to send Sergeant Malloy, with a dozen men, as soon as the coast was clear of the hostile Apaches, to run down 'Tonio wherever he might be, to secure and bring him in, a prisoner bound, and if he sought to escape, to shoot him dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

An atmosphere of peace ineffable surrounded old Camp Almy. The Indians lately infesting the neighborhood seemed to have gone away into the mountain fastnesses. Turner had pushed little scouting parties cautiously into the foothills to the west and the rugged country eastward across the stream. Others had ventured down to the Peak and scaled it in search of signal smokes or fires. Others still had explored the valley toward Dead Man's Cañon, and back by way of Bennett's, without finding so much as a moccasin print. Even the Apache-Mohaves seemed to have gone from the neighborhood. Malloy with his chosen ten was still out, and a rumor was prevalent that their orders might keep them away some days, so no apprehension was felt at their continued absence.

Another week was nearing an end. A runner, Hualpai, had come in from the far north-east, with despatches from Stannard. He was with General Crook and their comrades from the northward camps and stations. They had abundant supplies, had scattered and driven the Tontos, had made some prisoners of squaws and pappooses, who, even to the general, declared they knew not where the Bennett children had been hidden. The general was expecting to work southward along the Black Mesa to meet the column out from the Upper

San Carlos under Major Randall ("Big Chief Jake," the aforementioned) and between them they meant to leave no stone unturned in the effort to find the boys. Stannard enclosed a letter for his bonny wife, and closed with a word by way of postscript over which Archer and the three B's found themselves pondering not a little.

"Wish we had Harris and 'Tonio with us. Hope they are doing well. The general is anxious to meet and know them both."

Harris was not well. His convalescence had been interrupted and impaired, as we have seen, and no man thrives bodily when heart and soul are sore within him; and, heart and soul, Harris was sore. He was sitting up, to be sure, but it was plain to be seen he was suffering. Mrs. Stannard, wise woman that she was, believed she knew something of the cause and held her peace. Dr. Bentley, believing also that he knew something of the cause, was not so thoroughly wise. Between Mrs. Bennett, his patients at the hospital, mostly convalescent, and this young knight, the doctor was having a busy time of it. Mrs. Bennett improved not at all, but had at least become less violent in her anguish. At times she seemed almost in a stupor, and Mrs. Stannard was beginning to wonder whether the matron, worn out with her lamentations, had been administering surreptitious opiates. Mrs. Archer's visits had become less frequent, because for long hours she had had to go and sit with Lilian and her crippled hero. But now that hero was up and out on the veranda, basking in the sunshine of love unutterable, though enjoined as

yet to avoid the fervor of that of Arizona. Willett had never appeared to better advantage in his life than now, in modestly accepting congratulations, manfully asserting his unworthiness of the blessing that had come to him, and his determination, please God, to live a life of devotion to his new-found delight, this sweet floweret of the desert that so suddenly, so wonderfully, so dominantly had come to gladden, to bless, to inspire his career. Love is a marvellous beautifier, mental, moral and physical. In such pure and exquisite companionship, in the radiance of her presence, in the ecstasy of her sweet, shy, still half-timid caress, in the undoubted honesty of his resolution to be all her fondest wishes would have him, and in no easily shaken conviction that, even as he stood, he was a remarkably fine fellow, well calculated to make any girl happy, it was not difficult for Willett to rise superior to his past—to forget it, in fact, and to fancy himself for all times the high-minded, love-guided gentleman he stood to-day. Why should he not to the full rejoice in her delicious homage?—indulge her sweet rhapsodies?—encourage her fond day dreams? It was so easy now to be all deference and tenderness to the gentle mother he was soon to rob of her one darling, to be all respect and attention to the gallant old soldier father, to be everything that was exquisitely tender, fond, impassioned to this innocent and lovely girl, who trembled with delight at his kiss and clung in speechless rapture to his side. Life for him, even here at desolate Almy, had suddenly become a veritable heaven. Small wonder then that he quite forgot the purpose of his coming,

the sordid events that preceded that most fortunate catastrophe, the fire,—forgot or thrust aside all consideration of the episode at the store, the encounter at Harris's bedside, the events of the evening when he was hurled headlong among the rocks, the victim of 'Tonio's vengeful aim. He had even ceased to remember that he had ever been capable of considering "Hefty" Harris a rival, that he had ever been capable of undermining or intriguing or inspiring an official report that reflected sorely on Harris as an officer and leader. In his present mood, in fine, forgetful of all his past, his heart was overflowing with the milk of human kindness, even to Harris, and, having successfully tricked him out of everything worth having at the post, was quite ready to forgive him and once more be the friend, comrade and classmate of his own imaginings.

Harris alone had not come to congratulate him, but then, as Willett well knew, Harris could not. Mrs. Stannard and Dr. Bentley both reported him still too weak to walk about. He had had much fever and pain and loss of sleep, said they. But now, when in the soft light of this Friday evening, Willett essayed a stroll up the line, with Lilian almost dancing by his side, and with fond eyes following the graceful pair, he took it quite amiss that Harris did not come forth to envy, and to add his felicitations. Come to think of it, that very truthful woman, Mrs. Stannard (who never told even a society lie unless there was no way out of it), had brought no word from Harris, nor had Bentley mentioned such a thing, and this fact impressed itself upon the happy man as twice, thrice they

slowly promenaded past the open door of the doctor's quarters without a glimpse of Harris, and, finally, on the fourth, the return trip, Willett in his exuberant bliss, would not be denied.

"Harris! O—o—o— Hefty!" he shouted. "Come out and see a fellow!"

For a moment, silence. Then, not so resonant but still clearly audible, for both men had voices that "carried" and were used to command:

"Come in, if you will. Can't come out!"

"I can't without leaving my convoy," was the return shout, but as Willett glanced down into the lovely face so near his shoulder, he found it paling just a bit, and troubled, not rejoiceful. "What is it, sweet? Don't you—care to see him?"

"I think—I don't know—but—*he* might not."

It was too late. She would have led her lover away, for, young as she was, Lilian Archer had a woman's intuition, if not many a woman's wit. All on a sudden, unheard because of moccasined feet and the doctor's Indian matting, Harris stood in the doorway. He did not seem to look at Willett. His eyes at once sought her, and seemed closing to a slit as they encountered even the tempered light of declining day—the curious habit common to so many who have long scouted in the glare of desert suns. He hesitated not a moment. At sight of her he came quietly to the edge of the veranda and down the shallow steps, his face pale, as was to be expected, a grave smile upon his lips and even playing about the corners of those keen, blue-gray, unflinching eyes. He waited for no announcement or

salutation from his brother officer—Mrs. Stannard and the doctor had told him the news two days before, and there had been ample time in which to digest it. Down in the depths of his heart he believed that Willett had planned this "*coup*" for his especial mortification, and down to the tip of his toes he longed to kick him for it, whereas in Willett's exuberant self-gratulation, the one thought at the moment was really a "Rejoice with me." That other men should envy was, of course, to be expected. What worth were any triumph without the joy of being envied!

All his life he had been used to it. All his life, in childish sports, in boyish contest, on campus, rostrum, field or floor, among the lads at school, his fellows at the Point, his comrades in the service, wherever physical beauty, grace, skill and strength could prevail he had ever been easily winner, and when it came to women, what maid or matron had withstood his charm of manner? What man had ever yet prevailed against it? That others should long and strive for that which had come to him, unsought, unwooed, was something he could neither obviate nor deny. That was Nature's gift to him at birth. It was even magnanimous that, knowing this power, he should so often spare. Maids indeed might sigh at his indifference, but their solace lay in the eager offerings of other and less gifted men. Suffice it for him that at his beck the best of them would quit the shelter of other arms and come fluttering to his own. But now, of course, all this power of fascination must be sternly tempered, even suppressed. Henceforth he must be guarded. The winning of this pure

young heart, the possession of this sweet and winsome nature, the lavish homage of this fresh and fervent love should steel his hitherto vagrant fancy against all would-be-willing victims. The time had come when other women must be bidden, if need be, to droop and die. Henceforth he had naught to offer them but the contemplation of his content and her unquestioned queendom.

And so he could forgive it in Harris that he should come forth with no welcoming look for him, the conqueror, and only a yearning gaze for her. He could have felt quick resentment had Harris manifested nothing but rejoicing, even in expressing it. He had hated Harris when, deposed from his high rank as first captain of the Corps of Cadets, he had seen that far less showy soldier, his classmate, step easily into command and hold it with better discipline and ever-increasing respect from the entire battalion. The day of their departure from the Point had been to Willett an unforgotten, unforgiven lesson. It was the custom of the times—an unwritten, if unmilitary law—that on graduation day the class should appear at the mess hall at the dinner hour, and either singly or in little groups of two or three leave the building while the corps still sat at meat. It was even permitted that some should utter a word or two of farewell. Man after man Willett's fellows had taken their departure, and been accorded by the gray battalion a godspeed more or less thunderous as the individual was honored, popular, or merely a negative quantity. Willett had planned to be the last to leave, expectant of ovation that should

out-thunder all others, but the officer in charge apparently would not see that regulations were being ignored, that cadets were on their feet about the head of certain tables, actually clinging to would-be going fellows, in unbecoming and unaccustomed "cits," while he was forcibly restrained by none. So, finally, waving his natty straw to table after table, he passed on to the broad-arched entrance, the clamor of voice and the battering of the old time iron stool beginning in kindly and cordial fashion—they would not send a dog away, those big-hearted fellows, without some show of friendliness—yet in all that array he numbered not one real friend, for self-seeking had ever been his creed and there was no man of their sturdy brotherhood that did not know it. Beneath the arch he turned and gazed once more over the familiar scene, his eyes dry and glittering, his throat dry and husky. Yearlings and some upper classmen were making lively play with stamp and stool, but the din was more perfunctory than powerful—nowhere near what had happened the moment before when two well-beloved fellows, with bowed heads and moistened eyes, had fairly rushed from the hall lest men should see that at last there had come realization that this was the parting of the ways, that the daily habit of four long years was shed forever, that to most of their number the greeting of the gray battalion would be given never again. But he had his wits about him, even then. He saw that now at last, with but four minutes left before the companies must rise and quit the hall, Harris was coming—the new-made first captain, adjutant and quartermaster escorting—the commandants of table all

over the hall springing to their feet, and the wild rumble of hollow iron beginning the crescendo of swift-coming, stupendous thunder, and Willett stood and swung his hat, and classmates half-way down the slope turned back to see, and understood without seeing, that there was something back of it besides Willett. And then a tornado burst forth, as Harris, pale to the lips, halted at the door. His escort sprang aside, and to a man the battalion leaped to its feet and let go with voice and foot and hand, and the din was deafening. One moment he stood there, trembling with emotion, incapable of response, then whirled and darted down the steps, leaving Willett to acknowledge the tremendous ovation that speedily died away—almost to silence—ere he, too, turned and followed. "Good-by, fellows! God bless you!" shouted Willett, as though in final triumph. He had had the last word; had "taken the call," and the dramatic success of the day was his, or might have been, but for a most unprecedented incident.

"Hush! hush! Shut up!" were the stern, sudden words with which the elders repressed the juniors who, impulsively, would have broken forth again. "Wait! Wait, you fellows!" was the cry, for on a sudden half a dozen stalwart gray coats had sprung from the door, regardless of the corporal on duty, disdainful of demerit, had hurled themselves on wet-eyed Harris, had heaved him up on their shoulders, with pinioned, arm-locked, helpless legs, and frantic, impotently battling fists, and borne him struggling up the steps and once more within the massive portals, and then pandemonium broke loose, for this was no divided honor—there was

none to share it now. They bore him, vainly protesting, into the midst of the now risen battalion. They bore him forth into the June sunshine without. They surged about him under the trees and along the roadway, his halted classmates gazing back from the brow of the bluff, a swarm of spectators looking on, a stupefied group surging out from the officers' mess, conceiving that fire alone could account for the tumult. Then, over the uproar, could be heard the orders of the new captain. "Form your companies!" the shouts of the sergeants: "Fall in, men, fall in!" And then the demand: "March us back, Hefty! Take command once more!" "Start 'em back, Harris, for God's sake! I can never straighten 'em out," cried his half-laughing, half-sobbing successor, his first sergeant of the year gone by. He stood there prisoner, held by the staff and special duty men. He could not get away. Even the saturnine officer in charge stood a smiling observer, and, catching the young graduate's eye, waved approval and encouragement, and so there was no help for it. With a voice half-broken through emotion, he gave the old familiar commands that, three times a day for nearly ten long months previous, had sent them striding back through the gap between the old "Academic" and the gray gables of the Mess, and so on to the broad area of barracks beyond. Then, breaking away, he sprang over the eastward edge of the road, joined the waiting group of classmates at the crest of the hill, and with one long look at the disappearing gray and white column, turned his face to the winding road and the land-

ing below, where the whistling ferryboat lay impatient of their coming—whither Willett had already gone.

Was Willett thinking of that bygone scene this breathless evening in the heart of the desert valley, and the shadow of the westward mountain, as his once successful soldier rival came silently forward to grace his triumph in the field of love? Harris at least was not. His bearing was quite undramatic, simple, dignified. His greeting was almost too simple. "I can't give you my right hand, Miss Archer," said he, smiling gravely, "and I won't give a left-handed felicitation. It's my first opportunity," he continued, as he stood quietly before her, looking straight into her blushing face, "and I'm sorry it has to be in such shabby fashion." Then just as quietly and squarely he spoke to Willett, the gray-blue eyes looking keenly into the brown. "You are mightily to be congratulated, Willett," said he, "and we'll shake hands on it as soon as I have a hand to shake with."

"I knew you would, old fellow!" said Willett, putting forth the unoccupied hand and laying it upon the other's shoulder, a well-remembered way of his when he wished to be effusive. "I'm coming round presently to have a talk—but couldn't help coaxing you out now."

"How—*is* your shoulder, Mr. Harris?" began our Lilian, all observant of physical ills. On these, at least, she could pour the balm of her sympathy.

"Doing finely, thank you; and, pardon me, but the general is signalling. You're both wanted, I judge," and then, like the Union force at Second Bull Run, fell

back in the best of order, in spite of the worst of blows.

"I'll be with you again before a great while, Hefty, old boy," again called Willett over his shoulder, as though insistent on an invitation; but an assenting nod was all that came. The general had signalled to his children because of the concern in Bentley's face at sight of Harris confronting all that happiness, but Bentley need not have feared for him. He would not have feared could he have seen the little thing that happened. She had put forth a slender hand, half timidly, as Harris stepped backward. She was thinking even in the overmastering presence of this hero whom she worshipped, and to whose side she clung, of that moonlit evening on the veranda, of the hiss and skirr of the deadly rattler, of the peril that had menaced and the quick wit and nerve of him who had saved her, this very plain, sun-bleached, seasoned young knight, who seemed quite ready to risk life or limb in her defence, and who, said Willett, had lost most of his heart. It was foolish in him, with her Harold there; still it was something to be rewarded, somehow, and, womanlike, she tendered the contemplation of her inaccessibility in his rival's bliss. "You'll come to see us soon, Mr. Harris? I've so much to thank you for."

"Just as soon as the doctor will let me, Miss Archer," was his entirely proper answer, and quite as properly our Lilian breathed a little sigh of relief, as, nestling closer still, she sped lightly homeward, clinging to her lover's side. It was so sweet to think of him as all her own.

It is the mistake other and older girls so often make.

Even as she prattled in her bliss, looking radiantly into the fond, soft brown eyes that melted into hers, the summons of a rival claimant came swiftly down the vale, and the sentry at the northward post and the loungers at the lookouts were already screwing their eyelids into focus on the little dust cloud popping up along the stream fringe of willow. Two couriers came presently jogging into view, and before the general sat in the famous butler's pantry chair at the family table, he had told the contents of two despatches from the Gray Fox in the field, and decided for the moment to say nothing of the third. With the first and second, reporting progress and enclosing despatches to be forwarded to Prescott, we have nothing to do. With the last we may feel less concern than did they. Mrs. Archer, scanning the clear-cut face of her soldier lord, as he came within range of the hallway lamp, knew perfectly well he had something to conceal, and with never an instant's doubt or hesitation set herself to aid him. Without her tact and skill that little dinner of four, the last they were to know in many a day, would have been a sorrowful feast, for Archer was sore troubled in spirit. Not until an hour later could she get him to herself, leaving Lilian and her handsome Harold to bill and coo unsupervised, and then she only smiled bravely up into his face and said, "Now tell me, dear."

"It's that—that fool despatch I wrote about Harris coming like a curse, and chickens, home to roost." His hands were tremulous, his lips were twitching as he took from its envelope and unfolded a letter in the well-

known hand of the field commander's favorite aide-de-camp. "Read it aloud," he said; "perhaps it won't sound quite so—reproachful from you." And obediently she read:

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.

CAMP NEAR HEAD OF CHEVLON'S CREEK,
December 2, 187—.

DEAR GENERAL ARCHER:

Referring to the final paragraph of your despatch to Department Head-quarters, dated November —th, General Crook directs me to say that he was unaware of the instructions given Lieutenant Willett, aide-de-camp, to proceed to Camp Almy, and practically authorizing him to make certain investigations. It was far from his desire that anything should be done to even inferentially reflect upon the conduct of scouting parties from the post under your control. From reliable sources General Crook has full information as to the cause of the apparent ill success of Lieutenant Harris. Neither was he, nor were his scouts, to blame. It is the general's intention to see you before returning to Prescott and give you the facts in his possession; but meantime Lieutenant Harris has his entire confidence, and so have the few Apache-Mohave scouts, especially 'Tonio, all of whom, it is feared, have in some way incurred your disfavor.

Captain Stannard is away at this moment, but will assure you as to the value and gallantry of Harris's effort in behalf of poor Mrs. Bennett, and also that 'Tonio is almost equally entitled to credit. It was far from General Crook's intention that Lieutenant Harris should be impeded or hampered in the least. Lieutenant Willett has rendered distinguished service in the Columbia country, but is a stranger to the situation and the Indians we have to deal with, and should not be permitted in any way to interfere with Lieutenant Harris.

Orders were sent Willett some ten days ago to join us in the field, but the couriers, returned to-day, report that he was not at Prescott. If he should be still in your neighborhood, kindly inform him of the general's desire, and give him sufficient escort. We move toward Camp Apache to-morrow, and Stannard is already ahead in hopes of rescuing the Bennett boys.

With the general's warmest regards,

Yours as ever, BRIGHT.

"It's a very kind letter, dear," said she, kissing his wrinkled cheek. "General Crook wouldn't wound you for the world."

"It isn't—that, Bella," he answered sadly. "I've wounded myself, and now I've got to send—him—with word of my orders as to 'Tonio."

"Send him—word?" she faltered. "Do you mean——"

"Certainly, dear. Who should go—but Willett?"

CHAPTER XX.

It was then lacking nearly an hour of tattoo. Already the arriving couriers, their mission executed, their wearied horses turned over to willing hands at stables, their hunger appeased at the troop kitchen, and the pent-up hankering for beer still unassuaged, were "filling up" at the expense of their fellows at the store, and wistfully looking on at the game.

Muñoz, the ever-ready; Dago, the still demoralized, and one or two of their burro-bred community, were settled at monte, Dago and Muñoz eying each other like gladiators, and already a table had started at stud poker, that might readily develop into "draw." The barkeeper was a busy man, and had been given the tip to keep sober or lose the last hold he had on his job. The bookkeeper had for a few days past moved in silence about the premises, avoiding the common room as he would a lazaretto, avoiding even his kind. For most of the week he had been utterly unlike himself—strange, nervous, restless, starting at sudden sounds, abrupt in speech and manner, occasionally springing to the door and stepping forth into the sunlight, wandering about with hanging head and hands in pocket, coming back and slamming into his seat as though at odds with all creation, striving desperately to concentrate his thoughts on the columns of figures, and failing wretch-

edly. "Case is all broke up," said Craney, "and damned if I know why. Last week he was the most popular man in Yavapai, or all Arizona for that matter." What Craney and his partner mortally feared was that Case would take to drinking again, with payday close at hand—the time of all others Case had never yet failed them, the time of all others when breach of faith could mean nothing short of breach of all business relations. But up to nine P.M. this night of prospective relaxation Case had been a stalwart. The test was yet to come.

It was still half an hour of tattoo when old Bucketts came into Bentley's quarters and found that skilled practitioner replacing the bandages and sling on his patient's shoulder. The tidings brought by the couriers and given out by Archer had long since been digested. Bucketts had something new. "Doc," said he, "if you have anything to say or send to Stannard, now's your chance."

"Don't call me 'Doc'!" snapped Bentley. "If there's anything I hate it's this curtailing of titles as though they were too good for the man that bears them. One of these days you'll get your double bars, if you don't die of over-eating, and then how will you like it to be called 'cap'? How'd you like me to call you 'Buck' now? Who's going to Stannard?"

"Pass the 'buck,'" said the quartermaster sententiously. "I apologize. But Willett starts at daybreak—takes a sergeant, six men and a pack outfit—thought you'd like to know. Leaves us with mighty few cavalry, now that Malloy and his people are still out."

"What keeps them?" asked Harris, looking up from Bentley's busy hands. "I never heard what they were after."

"You never will," said Bucketts, "unless they stumble on it by accident," then colored under the look of surprise, almost of reproof, in the younger officer's face. It was not good that a post commander's instructions to his men at arms should be slightingly spoken of by one of his staff, and Bentley knew it; but Bucketts was already mentally kicking against those very instructions. Now he stood abashed and awkward. That Willett should be going seemed to Harris of small matter—a matter of course. He wished himself again in Willett's place.

"How soon can you let *me* be going?" he asked Bentley.

"We could have had you out by this time if you'd only quit fretting," was the gruff reply. "Well, I suppose Willett's glad of a chance to join his chief?" he said interrogatively, though never looking up.

"Not unless looks belie him," was the answer.

Bentley bent lower over his work. "No—physical hindrance that I know of," said he suggestively.

"It's financial, I take it," said Bucketts sturdily. "Our investigator finds it—expensive—here at Almy."

So the sore was rankling still, and that luckless order had hurt no one so much as him who bore it, and so those who might have been his friends were taking a certain malicious comfort in his discomfiture. It was not Willett's fault that he had come thus handicapped, but one thing added to another had made him the dis-

liked of men. Was it in compensation for this that he stood so beloved of women? Then Bucketts, having thus relieved himself, ventured again a glance at Harris, and the younger soldier's eyes were on his, searching, questioning. It was for Bucketts to explain, and he did it thus:

"Excuse me, Mr. Harris; I am not over-partial to this distinguished classmate of yours, and, to put it flatly, I'm no more his friend that he is yours. I'll say good-night." Whereupon this blunt official turned and quit the room, colliding at the door with an entering form, that of Strong, whose impact added to the quartermaster's distemper, for Strong was in a hurry, and half-savage mood.

"Doctor," said he, bolting in, with scant apology to his staggered fellow staff officer, "Craney wants to know if you're coming down to-night. He's worried a bit about Case."

"What's the matter with Case?" asked Bentley, barely looking up from the final tie of the sling, while Harris settled back in his chair.

"That's what he wants to ask *you*. I don't know, except he says Case hasn't slept for six nights, and he'll be wild as a hawk when the paymaster gets here; wants you to give him something to make him sleep, I believe. I told him I'd tell you, and now the general's shooting off his quill at the office. Hope you're better, Harris. Good-night."

"Reckon I'll have to go down awhile, anyhow. Harris, what Bucketts said was true, though he oughtn't to have said it. Willett has been playing late these

last two nights, with Watts, principally, but Craney says he seemed oddly anxious to get Case into the game, and Case wouldn't play—wouldn't stay about the place while Willett was there—wouldn't have anything to do with him. Willett has lost quite a lot, I'm told, and now he's ordered off."

Harris was still silent. He had no love for Willett, at best. He had had in their cadet days more reasons than one for his dislike. He had far more reason now, yet never dreamed of still another—that report to department head-quarters. But Willett was his classmate, and, outwardly, they were friends. Bentley and, in fact, all the officers at Almy were new-found acquaintances, well as some few were known to him by reputation. Still, it came to him something of a shock that Hal Willett should no sooner seem well enough to be about than he should turn directly from her good-night words—her kiss, perhaps—to the gambling table and its probable accompaniments. It boded ill for the happiness of that sweet girl's future, and as Harris sat brooding, Bentley, unheard, unnoted, slipped away, and presently, with brisk step and buoyant mien, Hal Willett himself came bounding in. Barely ten minutes ago Bucketts had given the impression that he seemed dejected, dispirited, yet Willett now was confidence and energy personified.

"Hefty, old boy, how much cash have you got in hand? I want three hundred dollars."

There was no answer for a moment. Well as Harris thought he knew Willett, this was a surprise.

"What for?" were the exact words of the response,

and neither in tone nor manner were there encouragement.

"I've got to pull out at dawn, I suppose you've heard, and I shouldn't like to leave I.O.U.'s—here!" And now the cheery confidence seemed evaporating. Willett's face was shading.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Harris reflectively. "I'd like to know something about—this."

"There isn't time, Harris. I'm in a hole, so to speak. I hate to bother you, but I'd rather come to a classmate and old friend, who is in position, as I know, to help out, than give these fellows a chance to talk. Probably they've been talking already, and you've heard," and now, with something like a resumption of the old familiar manner of their boy days at the Point, Willett settled on the broad, flat arm of the reclining chair and threw his own arm, long and muscular, over the back. There had come to be a saying in the gray battalion, when Willett was seen strolling with a comrade, his arm caressingly encircling him, "Well, Willett's doing the bunco act again." Possibly it was the instinctive shrinking of the wounded shoulder; certain it was that Harris drew perceptibly away, and Willett noticed it "I didn't hurt you, did I?" said he.

"It's rather touchy yet," was the answer.

"Well, say, Hefty, here's the situation. You don't play, so you won't appreciate, maybe, and I only play once in a good while, but they rung in a brace game on me. That fellow Case is no better'n a professional, and you saw for yourself here what a cad he could

be. He got my money that Saturday night and Sunday, and since then, like the cad he is, has refused to play it out—give me a chance to get it back——"

"Do you play with cads?" interrupted Harris.

"Not when I know it—to start with," answered Willett, flushing and beginning to draw away. Obviously the affectionate and confidential method was a failure. "But when a man's got your money, cad or no cad, you want it back."

"And Case has your three hundred dollars?"

"Just about. Then I owe Craney and Watts quite a lot. I lost a hundred in cash in the first place. I never saw such luck in all my life! And now, instead of going back to Prescott, I've got to skip for the warpath. Watts says the money he gave me in chips he owes to others who were in the game at one time or other, and he needs currency, not I.O.U.'s. Looks like a regular *com*bine, doesn't it?"

"You couldn't expect to win—everything there was in sight," said Harris quietly.

Willett flushed again. He had slipped from the broad arm to the narrow camp chair recently occupied by the doctor. Harris was displaying unexpected resistance. Willett had been accustomed to speedier surrender to his advances.

"It's more on that account than any other I hate to leave here with these things hanging over me," he answered moodily. Then, by way of expediting matters, "Time's mighty short—short as *I* am—and Watts says you have a stack of greenbacks in the safe."

Again silence a moment. Then Harris turned fully upon his visitor and spoke deliberately.

"You ask me to do what I declared three years ago I never would do, and that I have refused to do ever since—loan a man money with which to gamble or pay gambling debts. I need this money, Willett, to send home. I've been saving and sending home ever since I joined, but that's not why I won't play—and don't drink."

"Oh, we know how virtuous you are!" began Willett, with something like a sneer, but was checked with sudden, startling force. Harris almost sprang from his chair.

"None of that, Willett!" he cried, his voice harsh with anger. "Your ways and mine are wide apart, but I'll stand no sneering. You come to me for help and you're going to get it, not because you scoff at my views, but in spite of it; not for your sake, but that of the old Academy. You and I are the only West Pointers at this post, bar the dear old general. You and I are classmates, and I know you, and *don't* believe in you, but the money's yours for the asking. You say you come to me as an old friend, and I have never had faith in your friendship. I know how other men's and some women's names have suffered at your hands, and I don't know what you may have done to mine, but—" and now Harris was on his feet, standing over Willett—sitting there gripping the frail arms of a canvas-covered straddle-box, and looking up into the elder soldier's—the junior officer's—face in amaze. Never before had Willett been so braved by man or woman—"But your name

shall be protected for just two reasons—and protected just so long as you can show you're worth it. But—Willett, I'm not preaching on drink or gambling now. There's another thing you've got to stop—or I'm done with you." And then Harris himself stopped short.

"I don't know what you mean," began Willett, shifting uneasily.

"You *do* know what I mean! You've only to go back to your graduating June, when you were spooning day and night over a society flirt there at the hotel—a married woman at that—and your mantel-shelf was stacked high with unopened, unanswered letters from the poor girl you were engaged to. You were, Willett, in sight of God and man, so don't deny it! And she was telegraphing to me in pity to say was Harold sick—or what. She broke with you, of course, after you broke her heart. And you've been at that sort of thing ever since, unless the Division of the Pacific is a nest of liars—oh, bosh! I don't count Case, though it's like enough he told the truth. But now, Willett, you're *here!* and—what have we to expect at Almy?"

"Damn my past all you like, Harris. No man's more ashamed of it than I, but don't damn my future!" And now Willett was on *his* feet, his eyes snapping, his face aflame. "I was never so earnest in my life. [Small comfort that! thought Harris.] I never knew before what it was to be utterly in earnest. Stop it! Why, man, where have I—or you—ever known a girl like *her?* Stop it! Oh, here, Hefty, I can't talk as I feel. You *must* see how different this is—how much

this means to me! The man doesn't deserve to live that —that could be untrue to a girl like that?"

"That's—sound enough," said poor Hefty. "But how long will you hold to it?"

"So long as I live, Harris," was the solemn, the surprising answer. "God knows I mean it," and Willett held forth his hand.

And Willett believed he meant it—firmly, solemnly believed he meant it, and his handsome face was never handsomer, never more eloquent of love, repentance, determination to do a man's manful part in furtherance of his devotion than at this moment when, in the dimly lighted, scantily furnished, low-ceilinged little room, these two men of different mould, these classmates of the nation's soldier school, stood and looked into each other's eyes, and slowly Harris began to stretch forth his left hand, then, stopping suddenly, slipped the right forearm from its broad white sling, steadied the elbow with his left, and slowly turned the thin, feeble fingers to meet the warm clasp of that before him.

"It's one of 'Tonio's tricks," said he. "*Mano recto, mano cierto.* Stick to that, Willett, and, by God, I'll stand by you in spite of everything I've ever thought or heard. Steady!"

Somebody was at the door. Harris saw and checked the effusive thanks on Willett's lips.

"What's that about 'Tonio?" said a ringing voice, as a "blouse" and buttons followed the blue sleeve into the field of vision, and the adjutant came slowly in. "Queer! D'you know I was thinking of him that very minute. Signal fire out south-east! Some Ind-

ians want to talk and afraid to come in. Turner's gone out with a squad to sample 'em. Willett, how soon are you coming over? The general's got the despatches ready."

"Right away, if you like! What's it now?"

"Ten twenty," said Strong, with a squint at his watch. "There's no hurry. He's writing personals now, and Bentley's just up from the store. There's news in of some kind from McDowell way, and Muñoz and Sanchez have jumped the game and quit. You'll probably have 'Patchie guides after all, Willett. Going down to the store after awhile?"

"For a moment, perhaps, after I've said good-night at the general's," answered Willett, anxious now to end the business and be away. But in came Bentley.

"Get back to the office, Strong," said he; "the general wants you; Turner's in and says there's no one *near* the fire, no one to answer. All they found was this. The general thought you might understand it, Harris. It lay on a rock by the fire."

He held forth a single feather, gray and white, tied with a bit of pink tape to a scrap of cardboard, torn from some cartridge case and folded over. Within, roughly traced in paint, were two figures—a 3 and a 2.

"It means, 'Tonio," said Harris simply, "and he wants to talk. What has happened that he should be afraid to come in—here?"

Willett heard and knew and would have stayed, but the doctor for once looked embarrassed, and Strong signalled Willet to come with him. "I'll be back presently, Hefty," said Willett significantly, and vanished.

Even then Bentley faltered. "I'll let the general answer that," said he. "How can 'Tonio be summoned in?"

"Only as I did, at the Peak, and on honor that he may go," was the answer. "Unless—I can go out to him."

"You can't—to-night, anyhow! Is there no one else he'll meet who can understand him?"

"Only one American—Case."

"Humph!" was the answer, with a shrug and a keen, inquiring look in the doctor's eyes. "I've shown it to Case, and he says 'Tonio has only one object in life now, in or out of the post, and that is to square accounts with Willett, who was ass enough to strike him. This from Case, mind you, who, I believe, hates Willett himself. I've just got him stowed away for the night. Had to take him out of earshot of the store and put him in limbo at Craney's shack, where he can't hear what's going on. I gave him a dose that would flatten out St. Vitus himself. There'll be no budging Case this night unless—but that isn't likely."

"Then I need to go and see the general," said Harris.

"Then the general will come to see you—here. My word for it," said Bentley, and went his way.

It was then nearly eleven. Five minutes later Willett, with relieved heart and elastic step, was hastening back to the general's quarters where sweet, yet tearful, welcome awaited him. An hour later he stepped forth into the starlight, turning to kiss his hand and wave silent good-night to a slender, shadowy form at the doorway, under the shelter of the gallery. Something in its

pathetic droop and distress called him once again to her side, and with fond, clasping arms he drew the sobbing girl to his heart and pressed kiss after kiss upon the upturned, tear-wet little face. "Try to sleep, my darling!" he murmured. "Mother will wake you at four, and we'll have a moment before I go!"

"Mother won't *have* to wake me!" she cried, clinging to him the while. "Oh, Harold, if you only had not—to meet 'Tonio again!"

"No fear of 'Tonio, sweetheart," he answered. "Now, go I *must!*" And so, with her kiss upon his lips, he left her to be led by loving mother hands to her little white room, and to her humble prayers, and the love-guarded pillow, where, lying wide-awake, still an hour later, she heard the shot and stifled scream that called a garrison to arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

The early game at Craney's had languished that evening. It was too near pay-day—the wrong way—for money to be burning in soldier's pockets, and when the soldier has none the garrison hanger-on has no one to look to. The couriers from the field column, being comfortably filled and fairly well tired, meandered off with their martial chums at tattoo. The few ranchers and packers hovered about the monte table awhile, hopeful, perhaps, of a clash between Dago and Muñoz, but even this hope was crushed when, just about taps, two belated Mexicans, innocent or reckless of the proximity of signalling Indians across the stream, came mule-bestriding into the glare of the common room sconces and "olà'd," for Sanchez, who hurried out to meet them, heard their excited tale, cashed in his few chips, and took himself and fellows off. "Barkeep" stuck his head through the port-hole to the adjoining sanctum where sat Craney, Watts, and that semi-military official known as the "contract doctor," expectant, possibly, of others coming, and told them of the "greasers'" doings, whereat Case, nervously, irritably pacing the floor, looked up in sudden interest and speedily plunged out into the darkness. Then Bentley had come, just at the time when the few packers and ranch folk were making a noise, and Case had reappeared, looking

wilder, if anything, and declaring the greasers must have gone down to the old Sanchez place, Indian or no Indian. Then Bentley had felt his pulse and asked a lot of questions, and led him off into a corner for a little talk, and finally had prevailed on him to try to sleep in the vacant room at the "Shack," as Craney's own log-built cabin was called, and had led him away thither. He had never fairly gotten over the recent spree, said Craney. He would never explain what had induced him that Sunday afternoon to quit his old resort in the willows and go up to the officers' quarters, but go he had, for "Sudstown" had seen him, and had seen him later slinking back the longest way round to the store, keeping far from everybody, and looking badly shaken up. It was known, somehow, that he had been to the doctor's quarters, and, being half drunk, had got into Lieutenant Harris's room and there had made some noise and been ordered out. Rumor had it that there had been a scene between him and Lieutenant Willett, of which neither would speak, and the doctor had laid his commands on the attendant to know absolutely nothing about it—indeed, there was little he did know, save that there had been a disturbance. It was supposed at the store, and generally in the garrison, that Case had been drinking just enough to make him irresponsible, and in this condition he had ventured up to the post and made an ass of himself just when he was being trumpeted as a lion. Then, instead of having his spree out he had tried to taper, hence the highly nervous condition that had followed, which, instead of getting better, seemed getting worse.

"I've fixed him," said Bentley, "provided he keeps his word," and then, bidding Craney good-night, had gone to garrison, and found the general perturbed over Turner's report and the story about Muñoz. Together they had gone to the store again, the general and his medicine-man, to have some half-breed interpret the message of the feather, but by this time none was left. Together they had looked in on Case and found him drowsy and indifferent, but both the commander and his faithful ally distinctly heard his half-mumbled words as to 'Tonio's one object in life ere they came away, satisfied that Case would be of no further use for another night and day. Then Bentley had hurried to his other patient with the result we have already noted, and a little later the general went with him for still another visit, to soothe and reassure Harris, for the invalid officer was mad to be up and doing. There was something in the air.

Later still a stupid three-handed cribbage game was going on when, after eleven o'clock, Willett came briskly in. Strong had about given him up and was going home in spite of an unsettled account in his favor, which Willett had proposed to play off. They were all tired and ready for bed, and were only up because Willett was to leave and *should* "square things" before leaving the post. The cribbage game stopped at sight of him. Craney went with him to the private desk in the inner office, whence in five minutes out he came, buoyant as before, declined to sit in again, laughingly said he'd take his revenge on the back trip later, called for a night-cap all round, bade everybody in the room a cor-

dial good-night and good-by, and left with Strong at his heels.

"By gad!" said Craney, "he may not play like a sport, but he pays like one, and a game one," and he locked a roll of treasury notes in his safe. Then he and Watts and the disappointed deputy doctor went off to bed, leaving "barkeep" to close up when the few loungers quit paying for drinks, and only in the common room was there further stir about the store. Arrived at the shack, as Craney declared in the morning, he had taken a candle and gone softly to the back room where he found Case in bed and either dozing or drowsy or drugged—at all events he cared not to speak. His hat, coat and trousers hung on a chair; his shoes were at the foot of the bed, his watch on the table by his side, his money was locked in the trader's safe. Some medicine and a spoon stood by the watch. There was no light in the room save that which Craney carried; the one window was blanketed; sufficient air came through the loopholes, and the window sash was down against the hound pups that would otherwise have had free entrance. Then Craney went to bed and almost immediately to sleep, and heard nothing until after one o'clock, when, with shocking news, men came banging at his double-locked and bolted door.

Strong was one of the first to stir him, and Strong's face was white, as well it might be. As the sentries began calling midnight he had left Willett at the office, saying he must turn in for a few hours' rest. Willett, seemingly in excellent spirits, had been writing a few pages and addressing envelopes.

"I'll follow in twenty minutes or so," said he, "for I, too, need a snooze. I'll be up as soon as I've finished a little business." Strong had gone almost immediately to his pillow and to sleep, and was roused by the corporal of the guard who had run in to call him with the news that Lieutenant Willett had been shot dead.

At the moment of the shooting, so later said the guard, the waning moon, only a dull crescent, was up far enough above the eastward heights to throw a faint gleam over the valley. One of Turner's own men was on post at the south-east corner, and his yell for the corporal, instantly following the distant shot, was so excited and vehement that the infantry non-commissioned officer, who went at a run, was minded to rebuke him for raising such a row over a mere shooting scrape among the Mexican packers. "Packers, your granny!" said Number Six. "It's Lieutenant Willett that's shot, and I know it! He came down out of the office not twenty minutes ago and went straight out south for Craney's shack, and I'm betting he's done for."

And so indeed it looked when they found him but few minutes later—the whole guard, save the relief on post, coming swift at the run to the corporal's cry, and the garrison turning out, thinking sure it was fire. Three hundred yards or so south and east of the shack they found him lying flat on his face, which seemed forced into the soil, senseless, and for the moment apparently dead. Even when they turned him over and dashed water into his face, and brushed away the sand, there was no sign of life, nor sign of shot wound. Not until the doctor came on the run, urged by breathless

messenger, was the tiny bullet-hole found under the left armpit, and such blood as had escaped seemed absorbed by the underwear. Internal hemorrhage was feared as they unfastened his uniform and sought for further wound and found none. Craney bade them carry him to his own room, where there would be better light, and while some of them laid him on Craney's bed and others carefully scouted the surrounding willows for trace of the assassin, and others still went in and stirred up Case, sleeping heavily, stupidly, "like a hog," said an indignant few until told of the doctor's "dope." Then Bentley came and drove all but an attendant or two, and Strong and Craney, from the room, until the general arrived, his own face ashen, to ask what hope was left, got but a dubious headshake in reply, and then sat him down, buried his sorrowing white head in his hands, and began to upbraid himself:

"It's all my fault—my doing," said he. "I see it all. I said the words that sent him!"

And then to Bentley and Craney the veteran soldier told his story. He had had difficulty, as Bentley knew, in persuading Harris not to get up—not to attempt to find 'Tonio that night; to wait until day, when the Indian more easily might be reached. It was late when he left Harris, and was surprised to see lights at the office. There, all alone, was Willett, writing, and to Willett Archer told the message of the feather, and of Harris's eagerness to find 'Tonio at once.

"Harris still holds that 'Tonio is utterly wronged, or at least utterly misunderstood," said he, "and that, Indian as he is, 'Tonio would not revenge himself on

you as we supposed. 'Tonio knows he is suspected of the attempt to kill you, and yet wishes to come in and be tried. All he asks is fair play and trial before Crook himself. Then," continued Archer, "I asked Willett in so many words if it were true that he had struck 'Tonio with a gauntlet that night at Bennett's, and he said, reluctantly, it was—that 'Tonio had been insolent, insubordinate, that that was the way he had always dealt with such cases. Perhaps with men like 'Tonio it was all wrong, but he had never met Indians like 'Tonio before. I told him gravely that he had made a serious error, and that he should lose no time in getting word to 'Tonio that he realized this and desired to make amend. Willett said he would do it the very first time they met—that he knew how to bring 'Tonio in and would talk to him, man to man. I told him that it would be well to do this before quitting the valley, on his way out in the morning, perhaps. But, my God!" continued poor Archer, as he glanced at the senseless form over which physician and attendants were still working, "I never dreamed of his going out to-night. He said he should signal for a talk at the moment of starting with his escort, and so, probably, meet 'Tonio near the Peak."

A solemn little gathering was this at the shack, while up at the quarters two sorrow-stricken women, Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard, were striving to soothe and still poor Lilian, to whom the truth had had to be told. All the officers were up and astir, some of them conferring with their gray-faced commandant at the doorway, others heading the search over among the willows

and down the stream. A strange fact had developed. Only one shot had been heard, only one shot hole had been discovered (and the probe indicated that the bullet, having struck a rib, had been deflected downward, where it was not yet located), but while this had produced shock and, possibly, temporary unconsciousness, it was another blow, one with a blunt instrument, probably more than one, upon the back of the head, that resulted in this prolonged stupor. Not once had Willett regained consciousness, nor, said Bentley, was it likely that he would. Bentley feared concussion of the brain.

Turner, a capital trailer, with some of the best of his men, was working down stream, and all who knew Turner felt that no trace would be bunglingly trampled out. The few patchways along the west bank, through the willows, showed recent tracks on only one, where the Mexicans and half-breeds had scurried away toward the old Sanchez place. Already a strong party had been sent thither in search, but meantime Turner was looking, as he frankly said, "for 'Tonio's tracks about the ford," for within forty paces of the lower ford poor Willett was found, and in the minds of every man and woman who could hold a listener that night no other explanation was either sought or expected. The fact that both shores of the stream were stony above and below the spot—that it would be easy for an Indian to conceal them, would account for it if their footprints were lacking, but lacking they were not. In a dozen places about the ford and down the east bank, in a dozen places around the spot where lay the stricken officer, the earliest comers had seen and marked and protected

against obliteration print after print of the moccasins of the Apache-Mohaves—'Tonio's own band. This in itself was wellnigh proof positive, but more was to come.

Willett's trail was easily found and followed. Straight and swift he had gone across the flats from the post of Number Six, until within a hundred yards of the store, when, attracted possibly by the bleary lights still remaining in the barroom, he had veered that way until his footprints were merged with dozens of others in the path. Presently they were found again, passing between the store and the shack, around in rear of the low log building, where at that time, presumably, Craney, Watts and Case were asleep in their respective rooms. It seemed as though he had paused and moved about a little in rear of the shack as though in search of some one, and then had gone straight out beyond, heading for the nearest clump of willows south of the ford, and there it was found that the moccasin print overlaid that of the San Francisco boot and followed it up stream to where the torn and trampled sands, close to the brink, told of furious struggle. Moreover, this one moccasin print was wet and came over the stones and up the bank just about where Willett had reached it, and paused a moment or two before turning away. At this point the stream babbled over rocky shallows, and it was possible to cross by springing from rock to rock without wetting a sole, but whoever had crossed here had been hurried and incautious. One foot had missed, slipped or trailed, and its covering was soaking wet as it followed on up the bank. It was still

wet enough to leave, as the lantern determined, a perceptible trace on the broad stepping-stones just below the placid pool at the ford, where the shores were low and sandy again—so wet, in fact, that the stain toward the opposite bank and on the farthermost stone became a splash so dark that the foremost sergeant, swinging his lantern aloft, sung out to his follower, "Watch out! It's blood!" and blood it proved to be—there and thereafter, down the opposite bank.

Yet not a drop was seen on the sands where Willett fell. Then his assailants had not escaped unscathed. Unarmed as he was, the officer had made a desperate fight for life.

"Now's the time to nab him!" said Turner, as he carried the report to Archer. "'Tonio has managed to elude Malloy's party, probably by leading them off on a false scent, but now we have blood to follow. Let me send out a platoon, mounted, and we may nail the gang before sunrise."

It was then short of two o'clock, and while busy trailers followed on with their lanterns down the eastward bank, and were presently seen flitting like fireflies far south among the willows, Turner himself, with a score of his men, hastened back to quarters. There was saddling in hot haste, yet with the precision of long practice. By half past two all sight or sound of the trailers and the pursuing horsemen was lost in the distance, and a corporal, trotting back from the Sanchez place, reported that Muñoz and some of his fellows had joined in the search, and already with important result. Cap-

tain Turner sent him back with his compliments to the commanding officer.

In the presence of Bonner, Bucketts and Strong, the general took the package, something heavy, bundled in the red silk handkerchief Turner had torn from his own brawny throat. A scrap of paper went fluttering to the ground, which the adjutant quickly recovered and handed to his chief, who read aloud in the dim candle light the words: "It might be well to keep this from Harris, at least to-night."

Looking a trifle dazed, Archer unrolled the silken folds, and laid on the office table the handsome, silver-mounted Colt revolver of the old calibre 44 model Willett had lost that Sunday night of his perilous adventure up the valley. There it was, inscription and all, every visible chamber still loaded, its murderous leaden bullet showing in the candle light. Archer slowly drew back the hammer. The cylinder slowly revolved. The barrel-chamber swung as slowly into view, black, powder-stained, and—empty. One shot, then, had been fired and very recently. Who could have had it all this time but 'Tonio? Who else could have fired it?

CHAPTER XXII.

Turner and his men were gone all night, all the next day, and much of the night that followed. Then they began drifting back in squads of three or four. By noon the second day the captain himself, with the main body, returned, dispirited, mystified. They had lost the trail near the Picacho, found it again, lost it, found it, scoured the foothills and scouted the east face of the Mazatzal, and came back empty-handed. Willett's pistol was the only thing recovered, even with such aid as could be rendered by some of the Sanchez party, Muñoz and José being most energetic in their aid—"'Patchie" Sanchez being, of course, nowhere visible. 'Patchie had affairs of his own to answer for and explain against the homeward coming of the Big Chief Crook, and was shy of Saxon society in consequence.

And Turner was plainly nettled and chagrined. He and his troop were about as expert trailers as could be found in our cavalry, which, in the old Arizona days, meant not a little. Turned believed that 'Tonio had dared to venture close to the sentry line, had lured his enemy to the fords, and there, aided by one or two of his band, had done him near to death, then fled for the fastnesses of the mountains. Turner believed that 'Tonio, or one of his people, was wounded and could be overtaken. The trail was easy as much as a mile

down stream, and then became difficult. Turner had accepted the proffered aid of Muñoz and certain of their set. They were all up, it seems, by the time he reached the ranch, having been routed out earlier by the first explorers from the post, Sergeant Connelly and party, who stated that they found the "hull outfit asleep," this in spite of the fact that a game seemed to have been going on earlier in the night, for the paraphernalia were in evidence, also a moderate supply of liquid mescal.

Now mescal in those days was not distilled north of the Gila—was brought by devious route, when brought at all, from Mexico, and "Greaser" packers, who were models of temperance when only Gringo whiskey or German beer could be had, would sometimes stampede at the mere whisper of mescal. Yet here was mescal, and here were some, at least, of the Sanchez "outfit," sober and fit for business. Then it must be that the three who lay stupefied had had money to invest at monte, and had been plied with mescal until both cash and consciousness had left them, and all this would account for the sudden hegira from the store the evening preceding the shooting.

But in spite of their vehement assertions that 'Tonio had been signalling that very day—that they could point to the tracks of himself and his fellows in several places along the stream—these energetic and swarthy sons of the Incas could by no means find 'Tonio, or one of his tribe, when given the chance to lead and the backing of armed troopers. 'Tonio, well or wounded, was far too wary for them and, after hours

of brag and bluster, not a vestige of him did they discover beyond a few scattered footprints and that one revolver, concerning which, it seems, Muñoz told sensational tales. He declared he had found it glinting in the moonlight just at the foot and to the right of the trail leading from the low ground to the summit of Squadron Peak. His story, indeed, was so positive and plausible that valuable time had been lost while some of Turner's most active troopers scaled the height in search of the fugitives whom Muñoz thought more than likely must be there, and José had agreed with him. Once well up among the rocks of the Mazatzal, after sunrise, these valued allies became bewildered and gave out, were handed a canteen and ration of crackers apiece and left to limp back to the shack, while Turner pushed on. They were at the store, recuperating, when his people reappeared at Almy, and each had derisive and uncomplimentary things to say of the other. Moreover, there was internal dissension among the Mexicans themselves. Dago's disgust with Muñoz seemed rekindled, while the sore-headed trio, done out of their money by aid of mescal, were slinking about the shack, looking unutterable things. When rogues fall out honest men profit, if they are wise and wakeful, and now, at a time when something of advantage might be learned, the interest of the garrison seemed centred about the general's quarters, whither Harold Willett had been borne, still senseless and in desperate case. Bentley could not say that he would live, yet had been heard to say he believed the bullet not yet cast that could kill him.

There had been a difference between Archer and his surgeon. The shack was no place for a patient in such a plight. It was on low ground, hot and stuffy in spite of high ceilings. Bentley wished him borne on elastic litter to hospital. Archer said bear him to his quarters, Mrs. Archer *would* have it, and it was so ordered and done. Bentley wished to find that bullet, the blunt, old-fashioned, soft lead plug, and find it he had, lying fortunately close under the skin, after traversing several inches of Willett's anatomy without piercing a vital organ. It was cut out with little time or trouble, and set aside, sealed for future reference. Fever, of course, set in, and where, asked Archer, could more devoted nurse or nurses be found, and, in the absence of the patient's own mother, what woman had better right?

It wasn't so much *that,* said poor Bentley, as that they might overdo it—wear themselves out, and the patient, too. Willett was babbling in feverish delirium when his litter was borne into the general's dark hallway, and the patient thence to the white cot prepared for him, where Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard at first were installed as nurses. Bentley shook his head over the arrangement, and later he spoke of it to Harris who sat thoughtful, troubled and ill at ease.

Bentley had told him of the discovery of the revolver and the universal connection of 'Tonio with the attempted murder, and Harris bowed his head wearily upon his hands: "I will not believe it," was all he said.

A sergeant and six men had gone with despatches and orders to find the field column along the Black

Mesa. A runner had been sent to McDowell with the news, and another to Camp Sandy, where was Colonel Pelham, the district commander, giving details of the attempted assassination of the young staff officer, and warning all to arrest 'Tonio on sight. The affair was the one topic of talk in every barrack room, mess, and gathering at the post, and the subject of incessant comment and speculation at the store. That 'Tonio was the culprit no man was heard to express the faintest doubt. There were some who went so far as to say that *any* man, officer, soldier or civilian, who dared to strike an Indian of 'Tonio's lineage had nothing less to expect. The one question was, how had 'Tonio succeeded in luring his victim, unarmed, to the spot, and why had he left his vengeance unfinished? The one man along officers' row to express dissent from public opinion was Lieutenant Harris; the one man at the store to sit in unresponsive silence was Mr. Case—the bookkeeper.

Busy with his books, making up for the lost time, he said, sitting long hours at his desk, within earshot of almost everything, and hearing every theory expressed, he never so much as opened his lips upon the subject further than to say that, from all accounts, the lieutenant brought it on himself, and should never have ventured out alone, much less unarmed.

"You didn't like him any too well yourself," bluntly hazarded Bonner, two days after the tragedy, and, somehow, a rumor of a row between them at the doctor's quarters was again in circulation.

"I didn't," said Case, imperturbably. "But that score is settled."

In the course of the prompt investigation made by Archer during the daylight hours that followed the affray, Bentley had deemed it a duty to tell the commander of the disturbance between Willett and Case, ascribing it to Case's vinous excitement after some transaction at cards, and though Archer believed the bookkeeper totally innocent of any part in the distressing affair that followed, both he and Bentley believed it due to everybody that Case's possible connection with it be looked into. With Craney they visited Case's own sanctum in the store building not two hours after the sound of the shot. There in its accustomed place was Case's revolver, every chamber loaded and a thin coating of dust on the grip. Case's pistol then had not been used. Bentley went in and examined the medicine glass—this was toward four o'clock—and apparently Case must have taken, said Bentley, at least four doses. That much at any rate was gone, and Case was sleeping so heavily he could hardly be roused—could hardly be kept awake, begged thickly, sluggishly, to be allowed to "sleep it off," as though he thought he must have been drinking again. Bentley brought out one of Case's boots, and the track it fitted could be found all over the flats, about the store, shack and stream, and proved nothing at all, for everybody knew he had been wandering aimlessly about for days and nights past. The window shade or blanket had been disarranged and the window had been raised a few inches, probably for air. Everything else was

as Craney remembered seeing it before he turned in, and the inference was clear to every mind that Case had never left the room and probably, after the second dose, never left his bed.

And now, from Turner down, all troopers lately afield in search of 'Tonio were again at Almy, discomfited, disheartened. "Hunting for a needle in a haystack without a magnet," said Turner, "is no more fruitless than scouting for Apaches in these mountains without Apache scouts. There is only one way," said he, "to capture 'Tonio. 'Set a thief to catch a thief; set an Indian to catch an Indian.'" But the few Indian scouts assigned to Almy had all been drafted away with Stannard and the field columns in the Mogollon. "Even had they been available," said Archer, who listened with gloomy brow, "Harris says no Apache-Mohave would betray 'Tonio, and no Apache-Yuma dare do it," and now, as never before, Archer had taken to long talks with Harris—who would gladly have had him keep away.

"Youngster," said Bentley, looking his patient keenly over the second day after what had come to be called "the shooting," "I'm blessed if I'm not getting discouraged on your account. Here I have had you within reaching distance of 'fit for duty' twice, and both times you've gone back on me. It's my belief you'd be better anywhere else than here. Almy's too high strung for your temperament."

"Get me once in saddle and I won't come back—or go back on you," said Harris. "How's Willett?"

"High fever, tossing and talking—talking too

damned much! You're sitting up much of the time day and night now. You need air and change, yet cannot stand jarring, or I'd take you driving."

"Let me ride a mule."

"I would, if I were sure of the brute behaving, but you never can tell what a mule will do, and now—there's no telling what Willett may say."

"What do you mean?" asked Harris, though he had some reason to know.

"Just this. He's muttering about matters none of us now want to hear, and want none of the Archers to hear. I've got Mrs. Archer out for a time, and going to get Mrs. Stannard in for a time, but there's that poor child upstairs going all to pieces for fear that beautiful boy may die, when—it's—it's—*damn* it, it's my profound conviction it would be the best thing that could happen!" and with that Bentley turned about and strode heavily out of the house.

Just at sunset that winter's evening, when all the eastward heights were a blaze of gold, and the far away fringe of the Mogollon was tipped with fire, and the rounded poll of Squadron Peak shone dazzling against the southward sky, the lookout on the scaffolding above the office set up a shout that brought half the garrison to its feet.

"Horsemen coming! McDowell road!"

It so happened that, just at the moment, Mrs. Stannard was walking slowly and thoughtfully from the direction of the hospital to her lonely roof. She had been to see Mrs. Bennett, whose general condition appeared a little more favorable, but who lay long hours

moaning for those she had lost. Turner, coming in from the corrals, had joined Mrs. Stannard for a moment, but at sound of the alarm raised his cap and hurried straightway to the southward bluff. It might even mean a mail. The days were long to Mrs. Stannard and the nights were weary, for one anxiety followed another, and now, when she had so hoped that all might be gladness and sunshine for the sweet, unspoiled army girl, to whom her heart had so fondly opened, here at the very outset of her dream of love and delight, the grim Destroyer threatened, and even if Fate should spare the life of Harold Willett was it at all certain that that life would be what Lilian Archer deserved?

All in three minutes that afternoon, while bending over the unconscious sufferer, replacing with cool, fresh linen the heated bandages on his brow, she had heard words that she fain would have stifled—that caused her to look up, startled, into Bentley's sombre face. She was thinking of the sorrows that encompassed her as she came slowly home, and then, as the cry sounded from the lookout station, and people came hurrying to their galleries, and Harris slowly felt his way to the open door, she noted how pallid and sad and worn was the keen young face, and, forgetful of her troubles, turned to say a word of cheer to him.

"It used to mean the mail," said she, smiling brightly for his benefit, "but now no man can tell what a day may bring forth," she quoted. "The letters *I* most want would be coming from the east. What would you have coming from the west?"

"Anything to bring me word of 'Tonio," he answered, adding, though not for her ear, "and take me out of this." She stepped to the gallery and frankly took his hand, looking kindly, gravely at him with her sweet blue eyes.

"You are not doing well, Mr. Harris. You are fretting too much, I fear. Tell me. You believe in 'Tonio thoroughly, don't you? So did Captain Stannard, and so should I. Do you believe he would have tried to kill—Mr. Willett?"

"Mrs. Stannard, I *know* he would not!"

"Then I wish to ask you—something—something else. Was there—*is* there—any one who could—who would—*well*, who—had any reason?"

For a moment he stood gazing at her, paler even than before, his stern young face full of strange emotion.

"You have some reason for asking that, Mrs. Stannard," he said, almost below his breath. "You have heard—tell me; has he—has Willett told you anything?"

"Nothing that connects any one with this crime, and yet, while I cannot tell you, and the doctor may not, I'll promise you this, Mr. Harris. If ever 'Tonio is accused and in danger, Mr. Willett has something to explain, and if he doesn't, then Dr. Bentley and I may have to."

With that, almost abruptly, as though dreading further question, Mrs. Stannard turned away.

Thirty minutes later, dusty and weary, five troopers rode slowly through the southward willows, across the sandy flats and up the slope to the adjutant's office,

while the garrison, neglecting its evening meal, swarmed out to greet them. Six saddle-bags were crowded with letters and papers—the first in a fortnight—and the sergeant-major and his clerks went busily to work sorting out the mail, while Archer and his officers eagerly questioned the sergeant in charge. They were men of Captain Freeman's troop, all out scouting from McDowell. They camped last night at Silver Springs, fifty miles south-west, and came on from there while the captain and the troop turned back to the Verde Valley. No, they had neither seen nor heard of hostile Indians. All such seemed to have cleared out, for the time being at least. Had they met the Almy couriers on their way? Not one. They had come the lower trail by way of Standard Peak, where they had a signal station and guard now, where they left mail and rations for them, and then pushed on over into the valley. The Almy couriers took the short cut. No, they had seen nobody but some Mexicans, and hadn't much to say to them, 'cause Sanchez—'Patchie Sanchez—had been caught and was in the guard-house at McDowell, charged with being mixed up in the shooting of Sergeant Graves. That, at least, was welcome news. Had anything been heard of General Crook? Yes, something. Apache-Mohave runners came in to the bivouac at Silver Springs, with despatches, before they left, and that was one reason the captain turned back. One of them was wounded. They'd had a scrimmage with Tontos, they said, but got through safely, barring just this one —'Tonio they called him—said he was a chief of the old tribe.

"'Tonio there, and wounded!" cried Archer, while Strong and Bonner almost sprang to their feet, in surprise.

"'Tonio, sir, certainly," said the sergeant. "The doctor had him dressing his wound when we came away. It was only slight."

"Then," said the general, "by this time they've got my despatches, and 'Tonio's a doomed Indian!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

The week was closing, the third of a mournful little series of seven-day happenings, the like of which Almy had never before experienced, and it was hoped might never know again. "The Moon of Many Woes," as later it transpired the Indians had named the night goddess of November, was a thing of the past. A new queen had come, hovering like silvery filament over the black barrier of the Mazatzal in a sky cloudless and glinting with myriad points of fire. The nights were cold and still, the days soft yet brilliant in the blaze of an unshrouded sun. An almost Sabbath-like calm hovered over the valley, for even signal smokes had ceased to blur the horizon. Not a hostile Indian had been heard of since the coming of Freeman's couriers. The brawling gang of "greaser" gamblers had stolen away from the "ghost ranch." Even the ghost himself seemed to walk no more. Something had happened to call the firm of Muñoz y Sanchez elsewhere, and Dago, darkly glowering and scowling about the store, where day and night the bookkeeper sat absorbed in accounts and letters, muttered many a *carramba,* and had even been goaded into explosive *carrajo,* because a defrauded soldiery, thirsting for revenge or restitution, persisted in connecting him with these skilled but quite unprincipled experts of the alluring game of monte,

whereas Dago hated the sight of Muñoz, of whom he stood in dread.

But while all men knew the "greasers" had gone, and many wondered why, and none at Almy could tell, there was abundant reason to believe they would soon reappear. Much news had been coming in—news from Crook's column along the Mogollon and the eastward foothills—good news, too, for far and wide the Indians were heeding his Gospel of Peace, which, tersely translated, read: "Come in and be fed. Stay out and be fought," and by scores the mountain warriors, with their queerly assorted families, were flocking to the San Carlos and Apache reservations, and at last there seemed promise of a general burial of the hatchet. At last there was hope, wrote Stannard, that the Bennett boys would be restored. Good news, too, and stacks of mail, had come from Prescott and from far distant homes, but the bit of news that appealed to all but a chosen few at Camp Almy, as by all means the most important and welcome, was "The paymaster's coming!" The paymaster, indeed, after weeks of detention, was scheduled to be at the post by nightfall of the coming Tuesday or Wednesday, and Wednesday would usher in the old-time saturnalia of the south-western frontier, the joy of the laundress, soldier and sutler, the dread of every post and company commander from Her Majesty's dominion to the Mexican line—Pay Day.

And stacks of letters and some few papers and magazines—by no manner of means all that were hopefully started—had come to the Archers and Mrs. Stannard and the exiles of official Almy, and stacks of letters

were there for the slowly bettering young soldier lying helpless under the commander's roof, faithfully tended and devotedly nursed, the object of the fondest hope and love and prayer—Lieutenant Harold Willett, on detached service from "the Lost and Strayed," as aide-de-camp to the commanding general, Department of Arizona, who never yet since the day he left Vancouver Barracks had set eyes on him. Most of these letters, tied in tape, stood piled like bricks upon the mantel-shelf in the darkened quarters. Some few of them, in feminine superscription and bearing the Portland post-mark, Dr. Bentley had seen fit to segregate and set aside. They had been placed for safe keeping in the hands of Mrs. Stannard, of whom, said Bentley, "there are not ten women of her sense in the whole service," which, said Lieutenant Blake, of Camp McDowell, when told of the fact, "is a most egregious exaggeration," and no woman there knew just what he meant. Blake at the moment was riding boot to boot with his captain, Freeman, for between the two there dwelt an attachment and understanding rarely seen between captain and subaltern, but Freeman guffawed at his junior's whimsical remark, and told it, just to try the effect on three of the four heroines then quartered at the camp. No one of their number was there who did not envy Mrs. Stannard her place in public estimation, but no one of them, could they have known, would have envied her the plight in which she found herself—joint custodian, with Bentley, of Hal Willett's unconscious confidences—compelled to see a young girl's rapturous love lavished upon a man so saturated with the

incense of feminine idolatry as to be more than apt to underrate the priceless boon of a pure woman's heart-whole devotion.

They had clipped short, and shaved, much of the hair from the back and left side of Harold's handsome head, where fell the blows that had stunned him, but as those severe contusions healed, and it transpired that the skull was sound, the doctor's main anxiety was transferred to the gunshot wound, which might well be serious in view of the amount of anatomy traversed, yet even that was healing, healthfully, steadily. "A beautiful constitution has this damned young Lovelace," said Bentley to Bucketts, in whom he had long since found a kindred spirit. "Just look at that!" and with a nod over his pipe stem, he indicated the bunch of letters forwarded from the Columbia. "Why don't you"—began Bucketts, but dropped it—he knew it was impossible. He knew, moreover, that when both mother and daughter have set their hearts on a single man, paterfamilias is powerless. "The whole family's infatuated," said Bentley, "and in his whole handsome carcase there isn't half the man in Willett that there is in that dried up little chap yonder."

"The dried up little chap yonder," dismounting slowly and carefully from one of Turner's staidest troop horses, was the unappreciated Harris, returning from one of the first tentatives in saddle. Days before this, had he been permitted, Harris would have been up and away, he cared little whither. He wished to shake the dust of Almy from his deerskins, get back to the mountains and the warpath, get over the Mazatzal to Mc-

Dowell and 'Tonio—'Tonio, his faithful friend and fellow-scout, now languishing presumably behind prison bars, awaiting the orders of the Chief of Chieftains in his case, for all pleadings were vain. The last barrier to belief in his guilt had gone with the recovery of the revolver and the exposure of the cock-and-bull story, said Archer, by which he had humbugged Freeman and Blake into believing he had really been slashed in hand-to-hand fight with Tonto Apaches. The first name spoken by Willett, after the fever had left him, and speedily he began to recover sense, was that of 'Tonio—'Tonio who had shot him.

It had affected Harris to the point, almost, of relapse. He still fought vehemently against the story, declaring 'Tonio too high-minded, in spite of Indian blood and tradition, for a dirty bit of assassination. The brutal and bungling way in which the thing was done, said he, was enough to prove that 'Tonio had no hand in it. Thus could he talk to Bentley, at least, and even to Bucketts, who would listen, though he would not lie, and say he thought Harris right.

None the less there had been amaze at McDowell when Archer's demand was received. 'Tonio had been taken to hospital on his arrival, kindly, skilfully cared for by the young post surgeon, while the couriers had been sent on to Prescott. 'Tonio's wound was a knife slash in the left arm, and another in the side. He had lost much blood and had little left to build up with. He was too weak to attempt escape, wrote Major Brown, the post commander, even if he knew he was under arrest, which he did not. "If I have to confine him

it shall not be with such cattle as that half cad, half coyote, Sanchez," and Harris, being very improperly told of this missive, could almost have walked the weary miles to McDowell to fall upon the major's neck and bless him. "The very fact that 'Tonio was cut and slashed conflicts with every theory in the case," said he. "Who would have cut and slashed him but Willett, if 'Tonio attacked him, and Willett had no knife."

And still Camp Almy clung to the belief that 'Tonio was Harold Willett's assailant and would-be murderer. Even Bonner, a conservative, had this to say: "Willett admits he struck 'Tonio. What Indian ever forgave that affront? He hates Willett as he loves Harris, and such an Indian love is almost as strong as his hate. We have some reason to think Willett no friend of Harris. 'Tonio went further and thought him an enemy. Couple that with his own grievance and there's more than sufficient motive for his crime."

The topic was too one-sided to be mildly interesting. Moreover, the paymaster was coming, which overshadowed all minor considerations, and Turner was to take twenty men and meet him midway over to McDowell, and could have taken fifty had volunteers been called for, and the garrison to a man would have offered to sally forth, "with mattock and with spade" to patch up the crazy road that twisted through Picacho Pass—anything to get the man and his money to Camp Almy, for "devil a cent of four months' pay had the garrison, and more than double that," said Sergeant Malloy,

" is owin' me in I.O.U's that they wouldn't take for a treat at the store."

The night before Turner's fellows were to start, Mr. Harris coming with the doctor slowly homeward from the mess room and listening again, disgustedly, to arguments against his attempting to ride back with the paymaster to see 'Tonio at McDowell, the two came suddenly upon Archer, just stepping forth into the pallid moonlight. The general pulled up short at sight of them, and Harris silently raised his cap, the old-time salutation to the post commander.

" I was just about sending for you, Bentley," began the chief, as courteously he returned the salutation. " Bella thinks Willett's a bit flighty again, just now. Could you go in a moment? Come and take a chair, Harris," he added, as the doctor disappeared from the hallway. " We haven't seen you in a coon's age. What's this I hear about your wanting to go up to McDowell? Bentley says you're not yet strong enough."

" It's to see 'Tonio, sir. I'm about the only friend he has left," and Harris would have ignored the proffered chair, but the general again indicated his wish, which meant compliance.

" He'll need all he can get, I am afraid, my boy," and the answer was kind, even conciliatory. How was he ever going to admit to this uncompromising young campaigner that he had done him mighty wrong in his official despatch? Some time the boy must know it. Better know it through him, when it could be explained, perhaps condoned. They had exhausted the 'Tonio

subject, so far as was possible between commander and subaltern. They had never yet talked it as man to man. When they did it would be on Archer's initiation, not that of Harris. The more the old soldier studied the young man the better he liked him. The less they discussed 'Tonio, the better Harris liked Archer. It was useless saying more. Harris silently took the chair at his senior's side and Archer continued:

"If it would contribute to your strength as much as your peace of mind, I'd send you over in the forbidden ambulance, my boy"—how the voice trembled at the word that so often, so constantly in bygone days, was on his lips!—"but Bentley says 'not yet'—not even for a week, so what can an old fellow do?"

"You are all that is kind—to me, general," was the grave answer, "and I hope to persuade Bentley before the paymaster goes back. If I do——"

"If you do—that settles it— What is it, dear?" he asked, half rising from his chair. Harris was already on his feet. Lilian, all in white, save the belt at her slim waist, stood at the doorway and had spoken.

"Dr. Bentley asks that you come to him a moment, father. He is with —Mr. Willett." She saw who stood there by his side, and it was not so easy to say "Harold." Harris, bowing, would have backed from the veranda, but Archer interposed. "No, stay here awhile, lad; I—I want to talk with you. I'll be back in a moment."

Very possibly he thought he could be. But the moment lengthened. Lilian had come slowly forth.

Something had told her she was neither needed nor desired in the room just then. Even her mother, silently, had left the bedside and was hovering about the doorway. And now here was Harris. Lilian had matured a little, and paled not a little, in these few days of vigil and anxiety, but she was inexpressibly lovely as she stood and looked wistfully into his face. "You know he isn't quite so well to-day?" she said. "There's fever again. He craves ice so. What wouldn't I—we—give for some? What do you think he called me"—she gave a queer little nervous laugh—"just a moment ago as I was fanning him?"

Harris did not answer. He would have hazarded "Sanctissima," possibly, as he stood there looking intently into her clear, soft eyes, with all their depth of tenderness and trust. Good God! Why should any man have to have a past, when love such as this was possible? "He called me Stella. Mother said he was dreaming of the pet dog he left at Vancouver, but his eyes were wide open—looking right up at me."

Harris knew well who Stella was. The name was appended to many a letter and "wire" that came to him during First Class camp, and later, begging him to tell her of Mr. Willett, and now here was this fair girl virtually bidding him say he had known a Stella. He ground his teeth as he turned aside to set a chair for her. There had been others since Stella, unless all indications lied. What might she not say if she knew them all?

"*I* called my mother Topsy and Aunt Ophelia,

both, when I was getting over typhoid and Uncle Tom's Cabin," said he.

"Then Stella was only—" and the blue eyes were searching his.

"Only a—you know I was nearly 'found' in French. What would you call the parallel to a *nom de plume? Nom de chien? Nom de*—something visionary, at all events. He'll be sitting up day after to-morrow and telling you—all about it."

She stood before him, with those pretty, slender, white hands loosely clasped, the clear, truthful, beautiful eyes looking straight into his sun-tanned, yet pallid face. No man in his time at the Point had ever known Harris to flinch at the truth or dodge an issue. "He is square as they make 'em," was the verdict of his classmates, and square he had been through his subaltern days, and now to be square meant the dealing to this sweet and trusting girl a blow that, while it might down his rival, would wreck her happiness. He now had dodged an issue at last, and then came the further trial:

"Mr. Harris, dogs don't write. Harold's talking about Stella's *letters,* and says *you* get them."

He had dodged. He might as well flinch. The truth he would not tell her. A lie he could not tell her. He did, perhaps, the best he could for himself and the worst, perhaps, for her. He acted.

"Don't believe a word of it, Miss Lilian. He's mooning yet."

"Then—there wasn't any girl?—any letters?"

"There's only one girl in creation he cares for."

"But—Stella?" she persisted.

"Never saw his Stella in all my life. What he needs is ice, and I'm going to see he gets it."

With that he was gone, deaf to the words of relief the poor child would have spoken—trying to be deaf to the fierce upbraiding of conscience, and failing as he deserved, miserably.

An hour later that evening, with a pack mule, blankets, old newspapers and a brace of cracker boxes, two half-tamed Mohaves were heading for the heights to the north-east, where water would freeze in the canteens these December nights, and the rock tanks were nearly solid ice. Two hours later while Harris, nervous, irritable, and filled with nameless self-reproach, was pacing the narrow veranda at the doctor's quarters, there was a stir at the southward end of the post, a sound of hoofbeats and footfalls, a running to and fro and lighting up at the office. An orderly came on the jump and banged at the adjutant's door, and Strong shuffled forth in the moonlight and joined other dark forms over at head-quarters. The sentries were calling the midnight hour without, and the doctor was snoring placidly within. It was barely ten minutes before Strong came back, in one of his hurries, and Harris hailed for the tidings.

"Oh, *you'll* be glad, I'm betting!" was the answer, half-rueful, half-relieved, for somehow Strong had "taken to" the doctor's guest—and to doubting his own. "Those galoots at McDowell let up on their watch, and 'Tonio's walked off—'gone where the woodbine twineth'—'Patchie Sanchez with him!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

That meant new trouble—trouble for Major Brown commanding the little two-company station—the "tuppenny post," his subaltern, Blake, derisively termed it—trouble for Blake, who was officer of the day, and was held on tenterhooks for many a day thereafter—trouble for Sergeant Collins, who was directly in command of the guard—"Collins *né* Oolahan," as Freeman wrote him down, it having been discovered that this versatile Celt had served a previous enlistment in the "Lost and Strayed," when four of its companies were pioneering shortly after the war, where even the paymaster couldn't find them. Such of them as could be found in course of years were gathered up and sent to San Francisco for further exploration in other desert lands, but Oolahan and four of his fellows of Company "A," not having returned from wagon escort duty, were finally dropped as dead or deserted (those were days wherein nobody much cared which), whereas they were merely drunk at Cerbat. Under other names, as orthodox as the originals, they were now doing valorous and valuable service in other commands, Collins in particular proving a capital fighter and trooper, to the end that the best interests of the service were subserved by keeping a keen eye on his present and a "Nelson blind" on his past. Of the three soldiers thus involved

at McDowell, Collins was the one who took it most to heart, for Collins had come to think ill of 'Tonio, whom at first he had championed. Collins despised 'Patchie Sanchez, whom he had known five years, and described as a "durrty cross betune a skunk and a spitbox," a greaser Indian who would knife his best friend. As for 'Tonio, whom he had known ever since he came to Arizona in '65, and once held to be "the wan good Indian in it," 'Tonio had made him believe he too held Sanchez in contempt. Yet, to all appearance, the two, who up to this night had been confined entirely apart, had gone together. One of the counts in the unwritten indictments against McDowell was that its officers and men had lionized the dangerous Indian they were bidden to hold under careful guard, had held him without bond or shackle in a vacant room of the hospital, until that very day, when, stung by an inspector's comment, Brown ordered him at last into confinement with Sanchez, who was shackled to a post in the prison room. Yet all that was left of either was the "greaser's" chains. *Could* there have been collusion?

It meant more trouble for 'Tonio. Instead of facing investigation, as Harris declared he would, he had fled. It even meant more trouble for Harris, who, having stood his friend through thick and thin, proclaimed his innocence in spite of accumulation of evidence, now found himself utterly alone in his views and all Almy beginning to veer over to Willett. Willett, now able at last to recognize those about him, was sitting up a little to be nursed and petted and read to, a recovery in which the ice, for which Harris had sent his Indian

followers forty miles, had played no unimportant part. Willett was now the object of devoted care and unspeakable interest, for all Almy hoped to hear the story of the assault with intent to kill. But Almy was doomed to disappointment. Beyond the expression of an unalterable conviction that he had been shot down from ambush by 'Tonio, hammered senseless, and left for dead, Willett declared he knew no more about it than they did. He seemed, in fact, to know as little of them as he knew of Stella, when at last the doctor gave him, without a word, the little packet held in trust by Mrs. Stannard. "He is muddle-headed yet," said Bentley, in explanation. "He'll know more after awhile, which is more than we may," was the mental addition, as he looked into Mrs. Stannard's doubtful eyes.

But meanwhile further tidings had come from the San Carlos and beyond. "Big Chief Jake" had been doing some famous rounding up among the late recalcitrants. The General-in-Chief had given a feast to the incoming Indians, had shaken hands with their leaders, ordered rations for the families until the agency could again take them under its wing, had detailed escorts to conduct them by easy stages to the reservation set apart for them, but, as punctilious to the keeping of one part of a promise as to another, he sent forth his scouting parties to look up those Indians who had not come in, with strict orders to stick to it until the fate of the Bennett boys was definitely settled, and the scattered renegades were captured or destroyed. And this was why Mrs. Stannard was des-

tined to wait still awhile longer for the home-coming of her beloved captain. This was why, within the week that followed their mission in quest of ice, three Indian scouts that were still "casuals" at Almy, set forth eastward, full panoplied for the field, with little Harris at their head.

"Wouldn't you like to see Harold before you go?" Mrs. Archer had asked him when he called to say good-by. Her heart had warmed to him, as had Lilian's, in grateful appreciation of that gift of ice ("though of course Mr. Harris should know that now, under the circumstances, he really—well, it wasn't at all a matter to be spoken about, but dear Mrs. Stannard could see for herself that—it were quite as well that Mr. Harris got back to his duties"). Both mother and daughter, knowing well what it must have cost in time and labor, had thanked Harris very prettily, and fully meant all they said, which kept them from saying too much. It was but natural that his classmates should do anything for Harold.

"Would he care to see me?" asked Harris, very quietly.

"Well, he is sleeping just now, and he needs that so much. Lilian soothes him to sleep when no medicine can. He can't bear to have her out of his sight."

"Then I think I should not disturb them," said Harris. "He'll be himself again before we are a week away, and you can say good-by for me, also to Miss Lilian, will you not?"

It was thus he would have gone, but, as he turned away, compassion seized the mother's gentle heart, still

bleeding—bleeding for her own beloved boy. After all, how could any young fellow help loving her Lilian? How could Harris help it? Why should she wish to seek to hold him aloof? "Come back one minute," she cried, half choking, then disappeared within.

And so he turned again. He could not well refuse, and presently She came and smiled upon him and put her long, slim hand, cool from contact with iced towelling, into his hot, dry palm, and slipped the fingers slowly forth again, and spoke almost in whisper, lest the sleeper might hear her voice and know she had ventured forth and was conversing with some other man—all in that exaggerated precaution of word and manner that, whenever so much in love with one man, a girl so often observes toward others even ever so little in love with her.

"You have been so good to—us, Mr. Harris, and I know how—he will thank you when he is able. Till then you must let me. *Good*-by!" Poor comfort at best, yet what one of us would not have sought it rather than nothing? And then she was gone lest he should awake and remember—or Harris should awake and—and forget. She was but a child, after all, and her fond and beloved mother little less so.

And of such was Harris's leave taking, cool as his contribution to that happy rival's comfort, he thought, as he rode drearily away to the ford, with but a wave of the hand in response to the shout of Craney and Watts at the shack, while "Barkeep" and a few hangers-on stood gazing from under the canvas shade at the store, and Case, the silent bookkeeper, bent over

his desk by the east window—the desk wherein still reposed that big calibre 44, with every chamber loaded and the handle more coated with dust.

Half-way to the ford Harris's broncho stumbled and kicked up a muddy splash in the shallow pool. His rider reined him up sharply and spurred on; the three pack mules, following in file a scrawny Mexican on the bell horse, shied clear of the water cloud and emerged with dripping bellies from a deeper pool just to the left. The Indians, skipping dry-shod over the bowlders, a dozen yards below, turned their heads at sound of the stumble, and their keen eyes exchanged glances. Presently one of them shed his moccasins and waded in toward the mud cloud on the face of the rippling waters, and, while his companions stood at the bank, began searching in the knee-deep puddle. Presently again he swooped, thrust down a bare, brown arm almost to the shoulder, and drew forth a dripping object a foot long, covered with rust and mud. "Huh!" was all he said, as he splashed back to shore, exhibiting his prize to his fellows. Then together the three went a jog trot after Harris and held it up for his inspection. He took it curiously—an old-fashioned, war-time, percussion-capped Navy Colt—the pistol officers carried through the four years of battling in preference to the so-called Army Colt issued to the cavalry. "Some relic of the old volunteer days at Almy," said Harris to himself, and bade the Indian keep it. Nor did he think again of that pistol until many days later.

That night they bivouacked among the tanks under

Diamond Butte. Next day, toward sunset, as the smoke from the little cook fire went sailing aloft from the bank of a mountain stream that came tumbling from the Black Mesa, another little column of smoke answered from among the pines far up the heights. An Indian touched the young soldier's sleeve and pointed. Another moment and he was up, blanket in hand and signalling. That night the escaped prisoner, whom all commanders of posts or detachments were ordered to arrest wherever found, stood erect in the firelight, clasping hands with his young leader—'Tonio, the Apache-Mohave, and 'Tonio had a stirring tale to tell.

Barely five days later still, Archer and his wife sat hand in hand in the cool veranda, taking the air. The sun was just down and the flag had just fluttered to its rest. From the open casement came the murmur of happy voices, one so very happy it thrilled their hearts. Across the barren parade the men were just breaking ranks after retreat inspection, and the officers were coming homeward, unbelting sword or sabre as they neared their doors, in the impatient fashion of the day. Strong, the adjutant, still precise and buckled, stalked up to his commander's steps, halted, saluted, and said: "All present, sir, and couriers coming up the valley."

Archer rose to his feet and reached for his binocular. Forgetful of supper, many men began to gather at the edge of the bluff over by the office. A brace of sergeants had clambered to the lookout, and Mrs. Stannard, eager ever for news from her husband, came hurrying to join her friends. Twilight faded with al-

most tropical suddenness, but not before the coming riders could be recognized as troopers, and Mrs. Stannard's heart was praying they might be her Luce's men.

"If you had your wish," said Archer, as he lowered the glass and turned to where the two friends stood, their arms entwining, "what would you ask for, Mrs. Stannard?"

"My husband, I suppose," was the answer, "and yet—I've been sitting hours by poor Mrs. Bennett this day," and the blue eyes began to fill.

"Heaven send us news of those little fellows soon," said Archer piously. "If not, I'm afraid her heart will break. Bentley says the faint hope is all that holds her. Listen to that!" he suddenly cried. "Listen!"

Far down beyond the store somebody had set up a shout. Then, as they stood with beating hearts and straining ears, from the store itself went up another —three, four voices in unison—a shout that set every man along the edge of the mesa to swinging his hat. But a veteran sergeant, Bonner's level-headed right bower, sprang among them, with uplifted hand and voice. "Quiet, men! Don yell! Wait!" Then he came hurrying across the parade, straight to his post commander. "What is it, sergeant?" was the anxious query, and at the very moment the riders came wearily jogging over the brow of the hill.

"Couriers from General Crook, sir. They say the boys are found—safe."

Bentley was there almost as the foremost horseman

sprang from saddle. "Not a word of it to her—yet!" said he. "Wait until we know exactly. Go you, sergeant, and tell the steward on no account to let any one disturb her." And by this time Archer had torn open the letter handed him, and Doyle had come running out with a lamp. The expressions that chased each other over the general's features as he hurriedly read would have baffled an actor: first rejoicing, then amaze, then perplexity, if not trouble. "Can you tell us, dear?" was the gentle query that recalled him.

"Read it—aloud," he said, and though her voice was tremulous, the tone was clear and the hush breathless. Even Lilian and her lover could hear every word.

CAMP ON TONTO CREEK,
December ——, 5:30 A.M.

DEAR GENERAL:

Almy scores again. General Crook sends his best congratulations. The little Bennetts should be safely with you to-night. We see them as far as El Caporal. The general takes short cut for McDowell and thence home. Old Stannard never slept from the moment he got the word until he got the boys. Harris and 'Tonio located the rancheria and led unerringly. We are all happy.

Yours in haste, BRIGHT.

Even in her womanly joy over the rescue, there was wifely sympathy and instant understanding of her husband's swift-changing mood. The children were safe—that meant rejoicing for all. Stannard and his troop were the rescuers—that meant credit and triumph for Archer's post, and the general awarded it. But Harris and 'Tonio were the discoverers and leaders. 'Tonio, probably, was the man without whose aid nothing could have been accomplished. 'Tonio was the

hero, therefore, in the eyes of the commanding general—'Tonio, the man whom Archer would have condemned and shot. This meant perplexity, if not worry, as she quickly saw, and went and nestled to his side. Did ever soldier have such contrary luck as did hers?

But all were crowding about the couriers for particulars. "Yes," said the sturdy corporal, who was spokesman for the two, "the little fellows had been brought in a mule litter from way over toward Chevlon's Fork, straight to Crook's camp." Captain Stannard with most of his people would scout the country far as the Chiquito before returning. Lieutenant Harris and 'Tonio stayed with him, and the general's escort from "G" troop brought in the boys.

And by ten o'clock another rider came loping in. The party with the litter were just behind, the tiny occupants worn out and sound asleep. "Take them straight to the hospital," said Dr. Bentley. "Mrs. Archer, Mrs. Stannard, will you come with me?"

All Almy sat up late that night. Probably not a soldier eye was closed until long after eleven, and half the garrison clustered about the hospital, treading on tiptoe and speaking in whispers, as the little fellows were tenderly lifted from the litter, the weary mules were led away, and, in the arms of Mrs. Archer and Mrs. Stannard, the sleeping boys were borne, without word or sound, to the darkened room where, in the broad white bed that had been the hospital matron's, lay in the slumber of exhaustion their unconscious mother. Bentley closed the door behind them, noiselessly as possible. The steward and his wife, both with

tear-brimming eyes, stood by to aid. Deft hands disrobed the sleeping little forms (Mrs. Archer nearly sobbing aloud at sight of their thinned and wasted limbs), and invested them in borrowed "nighties" from buxom Mrs. Kelly's store. Then, cautiously, noiselessly, the light coverlet was partly raised, the weary little curly heads were pillowed close beside the mother's, and then, leaving the night light turned low, stealthily they drew away and waited. "She never sleeps more'n an hour or two at a time," whispered the steward. "She'll be sure to wake before long," and so they lingered near the doorway, and Camp Almy, much of it, clustered in the moonlight without. Ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still there was no sound from the darkened room, and then, over at the guard-house, the sentry on Number One started the call of eleven o'clock. Number Two, at the storehouse, took it up in his turn and trolled off his "All's well," and then it was Number Three's turn, out just under the edge of the bench, and Three muffled his voice and strove to turn it into a lullaby as he began, and, as the first words of the soldier watch cry came floating in through the partly open window, Mrs. Archer's hand stole forth and clasped that of Mrs. Stannard's, for the mother had begun to stir. Then, finger on lips, in tremulous excitement, those loving-hearted friends bent forward, and the watchers, five, listened and gazed, the women quivering with sympathy and emotion, for Mrs. Bennett's dark head was slowly lifting from the pillow, and then, all on a sudden went up a piercing cry—in a very agony of joy—incredulous, intolerable—"*Danny!*

"DANNY! Oh, my God! Don't say I'm dreaming! And JIMMY!"

And then, with lusty yowl, the younger of the startled cherubs entered his protest against this summary awakening, and the words of ecstatic thanksgiving were for the moment drowned in the chorus of infant lamentation. Even the rapture of restoration to mother arms was dimmed by consideration of present discomfort.

But within were glad-hearted friends, weeping joyfully with her. Without were sturdy soldiers, shaking hands and slapping backs and shoulders in clumsy delight, and somebody was moved to say he'd bet the Old Man wouldn't care if it *was* after taps, "and—Craney's was still open."

And so by dozens they went trooping down, for, though cash was scant and the paymaster overdue, the rules were suspended and Craney bade "Barkeep" credit all comers who drank to Harris; and Case, the bookkeeper, with white and twitching face, waylaid such men as came from the escort with odd, insistent questioning. If 'Tonio was really leader in the rescue, had nothing been seen of 'Patchie Sanchez? Was Sanchez heard of—nowhere?—until, with his fifth free drink to the health of everybody concerned, Corporal Dooley turned on Case with "What the hell's it to you, anyhow, whether 'Tonio led or Sanchez's dead?" and Craney, listening and watching, turned to Watts and asked had Case begun again? If so, they couldn't too speedily check him. "Come up here, if you're a man," insisted Dooley, "and have wan on me to big little

Harris and 'Tonio—'Tonio, bedad, even if he *did* do up Loot'nent Willett!"

Whereat, even in the noisy barroom there was sudden silence, save for responsive murmurs of 'Tonio's name, for strange sympathy had come sifting in from the columns afield. But Craney had heard in the adjoining room and was up in an instant, Watts following suit. This would never do. This was disloyalty to the best and gentlest and most courteous of post commanders, and no soldier should, no employé of his *could,* drink such a toast within Craney's doors. But he need not have feared. Promptly a big sergeant had interposed, and caught the corporal by the wrist, with thunderous "None of that, Dooley!" Prompt came Case's answer, though low-toned and guarded: "I'm drinking nothing, man, till after pay-day. *Then* come at me and I'll settle it with you drink for drink."

But Dooley's Irish blood was up, five fingers of tanglefoot tingling in each fist and bubbling in his brain. Struggling in the sergeant's grasp, he shouted his reply: "Settle be damned! How'd *you* settle wid Willett for the girl he did you out? Bluffed him on a queen high, and called it square! You're nothin' but a bluffer, Case, an' all Vancouver knowed it!" In the instant of awkward, amazed silence that followed no man moved. Then, his face still whiter, his lips livid, Case turned to Sergeant Woodrow. "That man has no right to be heard here—much less to be wearing chevrons," said he. "His name's Quigley, a deserter from the Lost and Strayed!"

It was then just midnight, and the sergeant of the

guard, coming to close the festivities, went back with an unlooked-for prisoner, who, every inch of the way, cursed and foamed and fought, and swore hideous vengeance on Case for a cur and a coward, so that the fury of his denunciation reached even the general's quarters, where peace and congratulation were having sway, and lovers were still whispering ere parting for the night—reached even the ears of Willett himself, reclining blissfully at the open window, with Lilian's hand in his, her fair head pillowed on his shoulder. There in the open hearth lay the ashes of the letters, unread, unopened, that had come to accuse him, but even the fires of hell could not burn out the memory of the wrong that, after all, had tracked him here unerringly, for in the few half-drunken, all-damning words that reached him, Harold Willett heard the trumpeting of his own disgrace. His sin had found him out.

And, barely an hour before, he had sworn to her that the Stella of whom he had babbled in his dreams was indeed but a favorite hound he had lost in the Columbia; that no Stella had penned a line to him in years, and, taking her sweet, upturned face between his palms, with the soft, tender brown eyes looking fondly down into the trustful, beautiful blue, he had said: "My darling, like other men, I have had fancies in boyish days, and even a flame or two, but never a love, *real* love, until you came into my life. In a week now I must be with my general at Prescott, but every day, every moment of my absence, you will be the only girl in all the world to me. I shall shrink from the mere

touch of another hand. I shall count the hours until you become my wife."

And she believed him, utterly, poor soul. He even believed himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Gray Fox had returned to his own. The general commanding the department was spending a month at head-quarters—for him, who loved the mountains and the field, a most unusual thing. The wild tribes of Arizona, with the exception of one specially exempted band of Chiricahuas and a few hopeless desperadoes with a price on their heads, were gathered to their reservations—a most unheard-of thing in all previous annals of the territory—and a season of unprecedented gayety had dawned on the post of Fort Whipple and the adjacent martial settlement, the homes of the staff and their families. The general and his good wife, childless, and boundless in their hospitality, had opened their doors to army wayfarers. New officers were there from 'Frisco and the States. Matrons and young women, new to Arizona, had come to enliven the once isolated posts of the desert and mountain. Major Dennis, of one supply department, was accompanied by a young and lovely and lively wife, who danced, if Dennis did not. Major Prime, of another, had recently been joined by his wife and two daughters, bright, vivacious girls, just out of school and into society, and, perhaps most important of all, Colonel and Mrs. Darrah, of the Infantry, had come,

accompanied by their daughter Evelyn, as beautiful and dashing a belle as had ever bewildered the bachelors about the Golden Gate, and from every camp or post within a hundred miles or more junior officers had been called in to Prescott, on "Board," court-martial duty or leave, until nearly a dozen were gathered, and while boards and courts dragged their slow length, and maps, reports and records of the recent campaign were being laboriously yawned over at odd intervals during the sunshiny days, far more thought and time and attention were being given to riding, driving, tramping and picnic parties—even croquet coming in for honorable mention—while every night had its "hop" and some nights their ball that lasted well toward morning, and for the first time in its history "head-quarters" was actually gay. Time had been in the recent past when a Fort Whipple hop consisted, as said a cynical chief commissary, in "putting on full uniform and watching Thompson dance a waltz," there being then but one officer at the station equipped with the requisite accomplishment. Now there were more dancers than girl partners. The latter were in their glory, and the married women in clover. "*Let* them have a good time," said the chief, when his pragmatical adjutant would have suggested sending some of them back to their posts to finish maps and reports they were only neglecting here. "But they'll be getting impatient at division head-quarters," said the man of tape and rule. It was a whip which often told on department commanders, but not on Crook. "*Let* them have a good time. Every one of those youngsters has been scout-

ing and fighting and living on bacon and beans for the last six months, and I like to see them dance." The office-bred officer sighed, and wondered what the papers, or Congress, would say if they knew it. The service-tried soldier said he'd take all the raps and responsibility, and that ended it. So here were the young gallants of the cavalry and infantry, active, slender, sinewy, clear-eyed, bronze-cheeked fellows, as a rule, capital dancers and riders, all-round partners, too, though few had a penny laid by for a rainy day, and several had mortgaged pay accounts. There was Billy Ray, from Camp Cameron, who could outride a *vaquero,* and "Legs" Blake from McDowell, who could outclimb an Apache, and Stryker, of the scouts, who had won fame in a year, and "Lord" Mitchell, his classmate, whom the troopers laughed at for a fop the first few months, and then worshipped for his daring after the pitched battle at the Caves. There were three or four young benedicts with better halves in the far East, who had forgotten little of their dancing days, and not too much of their wooing, and there were lesser lights among the subs, and two or three captains still uncaught, and even one or two men of whom others spoke not too highly, like Craven, and "that man Gleason," to whom Blake would not speak at all. Then there were Steele and Kelly from Wickenberg and Date Creek, and Strong was to come up from Almy, bringing with him in chains the desperado, 'Patchie Sanchez, secreted by his own people when charged with the killing of the interpreter, but tamely sold when a price was set on his head. And the commander sent

still another missive to Archer, whom the luckier general held in especial affection, enclosing one from the good wife to Mrs. Archer, begging that she and Lilian should be their guests for a week, "and as long thereafter as practicable," that the engagement might be ratified and celebrated, "for we all think Mr. Willett the most fortunate of men."

And then, of course, there were Wickham and Bright, the general's other aides, who were famous entertainers, and then, above all, perhaps—pitted for the first time against all the soldier beaux of Arizona—there was the general's latest acquisition, handsome, graceful, charming Hal Willett, who had, with characteristic modesty, made no mention of the fact that he was an engaged man until Mrs. Stannard's letter to Mrs. Crook told all about it, and we, who knew and loved Mrs. Stannard, knew just why she wrote, and never blamed her, as did Willett.

The very night of the very day it came he was dancing gloriously with, and had been saying things to, Evelyn Darrah that she one day earlier had listened to with bated breath. Now his mustache swept her pretty ear as he lowered his head in the midst of the loveliest "glide," and murmured something more, whereat she had suddenly swung herself out of the circle of his arm, swept him a stately courtesy and fairly startled—*stunned* him by the question: "Isn't that just a little high—for a gentleman's game, Mr. Willett?"

The very words were enough to amaze him! "What

on earth do you mean?" he demanded, as soon as he recovered self-control.

"I mean," said she, straightening to her full height again, and looking him fairly in the eyes, "that for an engaged man you have exceeded, or, as you would say, 'raised the limit.'"

There were dozens dancing, chatting, laughing about them, and some few watching, for his attentions, first to pretty Mrs. Dennis, and then the devotions by means of which he had swept aside all other suitors of Evelyn Darrah, had set all tongues to wagging. "The old Willett over again," said Bright, who had known him at the Point. Only that day had the mail come up from Almy and McDowell, and he ought to have known what it would betray. There must have been other letters—men's letters—for at mess there had been sly allusions to the fluctuations of fortune, the comparative values of "straights" and "pats," and this girl had turned and taunted him with the very words of that infernal, and he had hoped, forgotten game. Moreover, she, a brilliant, beautiful, practised woman of society, by no means the delicate and sensitive little desert flower whose worship he had won so readily, had dared to fence with him, had interested, piqued, fascinated, and now wellnigh bewitched him. He was not yet well of his wounds by any manner of means. He was still weak—far too weak to ride or climb or do much in the way of walking, but he could look, and be most interesting lolling in an invalid chair. Women had come and ministered to him in his convalescence, and pretty Mrs. Dennis had made quite a fool of herself,

said certain elders, but when it came to cutting in for Evelyn Darrah, Willett had had to be up and doing, even finally, for her and her alone, as he murmured, daring to dance. There was nothing else he did so supremely well, and men and women watched them enviously, perhaps, yet delightedly, and men and women were watching now as he followed her to her seat, dropped to the one beside her, and bent absorbedly over her again, pale, agitated, and they saw her speaking, saw him vehemently pleading, saw him prevailing, for his pallor and emotion lent force to his impassioned words. Practised belle, coquette, flirt she might have been, but the woman is rare indeed who can utterly disbelieve, in face of such a combination, that she at least is loved. Stella's impassioned letters once lay in unbroken packages upon his mantel. Another star had risen and set, and sent its missives only to the ashes of his grate, and now this very night, hidden in his desk, lay long, close-written, criss-crossed, exquisite pages, the outpourings of a young and guileless and glorious nature, and they, too, lay, as did that early Stella's, unread, unheeded, almost undesired, for the man was inflamed by this dauntless woman's defiance of him, and the devil in him was urging: woo her, win her, conquer her, *crush* her, come what may!

That night was but one of several in quick succession. On every hand he had to smile, and say conventional words of thanks for the pointed and repeated congratulations showered upon him. Men and women went out of their way at every turn to remind him, as it were, that he was a mortgaged man; and yet, so

strangely was he constituted, life for him at the moment seemed to have but one object worth attaining—Evelyn Darrah. Day and night he sought her, pursued her, and men began to shun him, and he never heeded. Women began to shrink from her, and she saw, yet, for to some there is the gambler's madness in the game, she *let* them shrink. What were their slights in comparison with the thrilling joy of this conquest? This man was at her feet, abject, pleading, praying. It was hers to spurn or sway him as she would. Never doubting her own power to turn him any instant adrift, she found delight in the passion of so virile, graceful, glorious a lover, the man of whom she had heard other women speak for three long years, and now he was hers—hers to do with as she dared—to break or make as was her caprice. What—what if men looked stern and women shrank? This was a game well worth the candle, let them sneer who would.

What had promised to be a fortnight of jollification had become charged with matters of grave moment. Strong had arrived, bringing the shackled Sanchez, and, when hospitably bidden to stay a week and have some fun, he said he reckoned he ought to get back as quick as possible—"the Old Man had much to bother him," this in confidence to Bright. "The Old Man's coming up here," said Bright, "quick as the general can coax him, and he's just going to have a welcome that will warm the cockles of his heart," and then, like the loyal aide he was, Bright essayed to make Archer's adjutant see that while the general commanding had been constrained to differ with the commander at Camp

Almy, he personally held him in affection and esteem. "I'm afraid," said he, "General Archer thinks he is misunderstood about this 'Tonio business, and—and—Harris. Here's Willett, now, perfectly willing to drop the whole case against 'Tonio and say no more about it."

"What?" said Strong, in amaze. "Why, at Almy he damned him time and again—swore he had twice tried to kill him. If he acquits 'Tonio, whom in God's name does he suspect?" asked Strong, a queer thought occurring to him as he recalled the furious words of the deserter Dooley, *alias* Quigley, another prisoner to be tried.

Bright dodged. "The queer thing about it," said he, "is that Brown there, at McDowell, is demanding investigation, and says he believes there was collusion in camp—men who insist that 'Tonio's a trump. And now we have news from Harris, and he demands investigation, in 'Tonio's name—says there's a side to the story only 'Tonio can tell, and will tell only to the Big Chief."

Strong pondered a moment. "There's more than one queer thing we can't fathom at Almy," said he. "Harris and 'Tonio never had anything to do with that Sanchez crowd. 'Tother Sanchez, and Muñoz, helped the chase of 'Tonio—did their best to catch him, and yet over at McDowell they're thick as thieves."

"Not a bit of it! They never saw each other until—well, somebody made Brown believe the general would censure his showing favors to 'Tonio, so what does he do but order him in with Sanchez. That night

both get away. Then 'Patchie's own people brought him back for cash. There isn't money or blood enough in all Arizona to tempt them to lay hands on 'Tonio. Sanchez wants to talk with the general, says he can tell things the chief would like to know. Can he?"

"How should I know?" asked Strong. "There's more of a mix in this business than I can straighten out. It looks to me as though more than one man had his grudge against this fine feathered bird that came down to show us how to tackle Apaches," and Bright changed the subject, as was his way when men or women ventured to question the methods of the Powers. All the same, he told his general of Strong's suspicions, and that night the general summoned both Sanchez and Strong, and there was a scene in the moonlight, down by the old log guard-house.

Sanchez, heavily shackled and scared almost out of his wits in the belief that he would speedily be hanged, or shot to death, fell on his knees at sight of the tall, bearded commander, and strove to seize his hand. In the indescribable jargon of the Indo-Mexican frontier, he implored the general's mercy; he wailed that he was a poor and wronged and innocent man. He had no thought of killing—only inducing the interpreter to leave him, and the interpreter tried to shoot him. It was to save his own life he slashed at his guardian and ran, never knowing he had hurt him. He was frightened at McDowell; though soldiers planned to lynch him. He dared not stay. He had filed his shackles and the window bars, and was watching opportunity to tear them loose and run, when 'Tonio was put in

his cell. That night he saw his chance, climbed out and slid away to the mountains, just before the third relief was inspected, but he did not wake or tell 'Tonio. 'Tonio was a wicked Indian, who twice tried to kill Lieutenant Willett. 'Tonio should be hanged. 'Tonio's people hated Sanchez, because he "always friend to the Big Chief Crook and the Americanos." 'Tonio knew where to find him, it seems, and set Lieutenant Harris to catch him. Now, said Sanchez, if Big Chief only would let him go he would bring in two, three 'Patchie-Mohaves, 'Tonio's own people, who saw 'Tonio shoot and try to kill Teniente Willett—saw him shoot and club, shoot twice. Sanchez called on the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to witness his innocence, his entire truth, and the chief, with just one gesture of disbelief and disgust, turned quietly away.

"You may as well tell him, Wickham," said he, and, with Bright at his side, strode back to head-quarters hill, leaving Strong and his senior aide to settle the matter.

"You damned fool!" said Blackbeard contemptuously. "It wasn't 'Tonio; it was your own people gave you up. It wasn't 'Tonio; it was your own brother shot Teniente Willett. His own revolver was found at the spot. Your own people say he did it!"

"Lie! Lie!" shrieked Sanchez, livid from fright and amaze. "José no have pistol that night. José lose him to Case—monte—two days before! *Case* shoot him! *Case* shoot him! Muñoz see him. 'Patchie-Mohave see him! Look, Señor Capitan, I bring them all—all say so."

"I thought we'd be getting at bottom facts before we finished with our greaser gang," said Wickham, with no symptom of either surprise or emotion. "Very good, Sanchez. We'll give you the chance to swear to it and bring your witnesses. Take him in, sergeant, and keep this to yourself. Now bring out Dooley."

Half an hour later, just as the midnight call of the sentries was going the rounds, Hal Willett, after whispered words of good-night to a tall and slender shadow at Darrah's door, came swiftly up the steps of his new quarters, and was surprised to find a little group at the adjoining veranda. Two civilians were there, one of whom he knew to be the sheriff. Strong was there and Wickham was giving some instructions in low tone to the three.

"You start at dawn," were the words that caught Willett's ear, "and you should have him at Prescott within the week. Sure you need no further escort?"

"Sure," was the sententious answer of the tall civilian, as he sauntered to the steps.

"What is it?" asked Willett, at a venture.

"Just a flyer, Willett," said Blackbeard, in the most off-hand manner imaginable. "Sanchez swears it was Case who shot you, and we're having him up to explain."

For an instant four men stood watching Willett's face. Pale at almost any time of late, it seemed to have turned ashen in the pallid light about them. He swayed, too, a trifle, as though from sudden shock, and it was a second or two before he found his voice. Then:

"What infernal rot! Didn't they find my own pis-

tol, that 'Tonio had stolen, where his fellows or he had dropped it in their flight?"

"O, Lord, yes," was the airy answer, "five miles away. But Harris found the real one, right there at the spot. Case won it from Sanchez just two days before. So he'll be here with 'Tonio the end of the week."

CHAPTER XXVI.

That week was a bad one for Harold Willett. The general, taking Bright with him as usual, had whirled away in his stout spring wagon to supervise the re-establishment of the Indians lately in rebellion. The agent at the Verde reservation had developed symptoms of stampede that were later diagnosed and treated as insanity. It must be owned that he had lived through troublous times and had had experiences to try the nerve of a man of iron, which he was not. The general, after settling matters to his satisfaction at the reservation, purposed a descent on Colonel Pelham and Camp Sandy, for consultation with him and a conference with the troop and company commanders returned to their soldier honors, after their strenuous scout through the mountains. He left Wickham to represent him at headquarters and continue his investigation, and he left Willett to—recuperate, for already he had repented him of the impulse that led to the brilliant officer's appointment on his personal staff. Willett had been a valuable and distinguished soldier in that northern field, and only by these things had the general known him. That Willett was a many-sided man, that he could be an eager and ambitious officer when once afield, and a mere butterfly about the garrison, had not occurred to this simple-minded chief. The combination of terrier

and lapdog is rare in the army. However, Willett was not yet fit for field service, and the Gray Fox meant that he should have fair play and a chance to redeem himself.

"We couldn't send him away just now even if he were fit to ride," said Wickham confidentially to his brother aide-de-camp. "Dooley's trial begins presently, and he wants Willett as to character. But Archer and his household should be here by Friday. Then he'll have to behave."

Willett, of course, knew that Archer had been sent for, was coming up and would probably bring Mrs. Archer and Lilian. According to his estimate, too, the family should be here some time Friday. Meantime he had a fortress to reduce whose garrison had already flung out signals of distress. "Evelyn Darrah may have been a flirt at 'Frisco," said Mrs. Crook, "and she's had more experience than most girls of her years, but she's not heartless, and that good-looking scamp knows it."

"Have you talked with Mrs. Darrah?" asked a fair friend at a venture.

"Talked with Kate Darrah! Of course I've talked with her! and told her just what people are saying and thinking, but Kate Darrah was just such a flirt when she was a girl. Kate Darrah many a time pulled the wool over her mother's eyes, and now hers is being pulled the same way. Evvy leads her mother by the nose."

"Colonel Darrah, then," was the suggestion.

"Dicky Darrah!" laughed Mrs. Crook, in merry

disdain. "Dicky Darrah never dares oppose Evvy—let alone his wife. Kate Darrah says it just serves Hal Willett right. It's no fault of hers that he's daft about Evvy, who's simply bent on giving him a lesson he richly deserves. When the Archers come she'll drop it—and him."

But the Archers came sooner than any one about Prescott deemed likely at all. Somebody said, and more than one somebody thought, that Mrs. Archer had had more than a hint as to what was going on. But never did Mrs. Archer look or admit it. The mail riders had resumed their trips. The paymaster had made his visit to McDowell and had safely traversed the Mazatzal and distributed his shekels at Almy. Almost every day there had been comings and goings, and though no letters bearing Willett's superscription went to Almy except by regular mail, even these, it seems, the pressure of his duties made brief and unlike what Lilian had looked for, so that the radiance had gone from her sweet face almost as quickly as it came. Even the girl who bravely insists that the beloved one is beyond doubt, and above suspicion, and all that is perfect, as Lilian strove to insist—even she will feel in her heart of hearts that there has been neglect, and neglect crushes.

Archer saw and said nothing but "Get ready as quick as we can." They were looked for Friday noon. They were ushered into the general's hospitable quarters late Thursday evening, relayed on from the Agua Fria, after a good noonday rest in camp, and even in bidding them welcome, welcome over again,

Mrs. Crook pointed to the brightly lighted assembly room down the winding roadway. "They're having a holiday dance to-night," said she to Lilian. "We'll toddle down after tea and take them all by surprise."

For three days Willett had hardly been seen at the office, where indeed there was little for him to do, except perhaps read the letters that had begun to come again from various quarters. He had merely slept at home; he had simply lived at the Darrahs. He was hardly seen by any associates except dancing attendance upon this tall, imperious beauty, who, for her part, seemed now to accept his devotions as a matter of course, and to be regardless of public opinion. Begun in pique, or vanity, or devilment, whatever it may have been at the start, her indifference at first, her coquetry, her wiles, her defiance of his powers had spurred, fascinated and finally maddened him. Then, when she would have drawn back, his apparent, his acted or his actual desperation terrified her, and, all too late, her own battered heart cried out for relief. In spite of herself she found her resolution gone, her indifference rebuked, her strength wasted, sapped. She was yielding to him when she meant to scorn. She was clinging to him when she meant to spurn. And now the last night, the last of their—flirtation had come, and as she fluttered away on his arm to take their place in the dance, the cynosure of all eyes, Evelyn Darrah *knew* that she was facing her fate, that before the midnight hour she must answer. He would so have it. Recklessly enough she had begun. What meant such affairs to her but a laugh? Yet, only the night before, as

they stood murmuring in the shade at her father's doorway, and he was begging for some little word, touch, token—something to bid him hope in the hell of his despair, imploring her to see his engagement as he saw it—a something entered into in his enfeebled condition because he saw, everybody saw, that fair young girl's self-betrayal, and he had mistaken gratitude, pity, tenderness for love, until he, Harold Willett, had met *her,* Evelyn Darrah, and at last learned what it was to love, passionately, overwhelmingly—to love, to worship, to need, to crave, and then on a sudden she had felt herself seized in his clasp, and before she could, if she would, tear herself adrift, his lips, burning with eagerness, had sought and found hers—upraised. Then she had broken from his embrace, but not till then. *This* morning she had pleaded headache and kept to her room. *This* afternoon she had had to meet him, and could not repel, reproach, rebuke as she had at last meant to do. Others were ever about them then. There must be no scene, and he was quite capable of making one. And now this night he had come for her, yes, and for her answer. He was ready, he said, to resign from the staff at once, return to his regiment, break with the Archers, explaining that it was all—all a mistake, and then with her promise to be his wife, what spur would there not be to his ambition? He—but it all made her feverish—frantic! There was but one refuge—to dance, dance until her whirling brain and throbbing heart were exhausted in the wild exhilaration, to dance incessantly, with man after man who sought her, though few had opportunity

owing to his persistence. And she had been dancing incessantly, as we danced in those days—galop, deux temps, redowa, waltz, the long, undulating, luxurious, sensuous sweep of the "glide," and men and women stood and watched them, time and again, when Willett claimed her—and he hardly had look or word for others—so wondrous was that harmony of motion, that grace and beauty of feature and of form. Then at last came exhaustion.

There were some little clumps of cedars on the slope just south of the assembly hall, as it stood there on the low ground midway between the head-quarters houses on the ridge to the south, and the even less commodious cottages of the puny garrison. There was a boardwalk of creaking pine, leading across the shallow ravine, for it sometimes rained up here in the mountains, though it never seemed to in the deep, arid valleys to the east. Then there was a gravel path stretching away toward the garrison houses north and north-east, and one, still narrower and crookeder, winding up among the pines and cedars and disappearing over the top of the knoll, where the broad veranda of the general's mansion overlooked the entire scene. Sometimes when the evenings were warm and the dancers flushed, and sometimes even when there was no such excuse, young couples were wont to saunter out in the starlight for air and sentiment and "spooning." Already Willett knew the labyrinth, and welcomed the excuse to lead her forth, his arm almost supporting her. It was about eleven. The elders were absorbing mild refreshments at the moment. The

musicians were glad of a rest, a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and a puff at a pipe before again resuming their melodious, if monotonous, labor. The windows of the assembly room were so near the ground that it was easy for these who did not attend the dances to supervise from without, and it often happened that a fringe of respectfully admiring spectators would surround the building until the late roll-call summoned the soldier circle away.

And yet this Thursday night there were two or three little parties peering in at the southward windows, some of whom came down from the general's quarters very late. To Mrs. Crook's laughing suggestion that they should "toddle down after tea" Mrs. Archer had entered gentle protest. It was too late. They were not dressed. She feared Lilian was too tired. What mother would not oppose her precious daughter's making her appearance at a dance in travelling garb, after a day of driving? To her mother's protest Lilian had at first made no rejoinder. The flush of the first few minutes of welcomed arrival soon left her winsome face, and the resultant pallor emphasized her mother's edict —that she was too tired. But it was not long before they noted, all of them—father, mother and hostess—that her thoughts were only there at the dance, that her ears were attentive only to the strains of music that, once in a while, came wafting upward from the hall, and when a little later, refreshed by tea and a bountiful supper, they again returned to the parlor and the sound of the dance, Mrs. Crook caught the longing in Lilian's eyes.

"Oh, come," she said, "let's just run down a few minutes and peep in; Lilian wants to see, and I'll send word in, sidewise, that will bring somebody out with a jump."

They seized their wraps and started, Archer gallantly tendering his arm to the commander's wife, but she would none of it. "Nonsense! I've got to pilot *you!* That walk is steep and crooked and pitch dark when you get among the cedars. I want to chat with Mrs. Archer," and the old soldier thanked her in his heart. More than ever before he wished to have that arm about his own little girl this night. Was it possible she too felt the premonition that had come to him? Had her mother, after all, told her of the little hints they had received? Something had come. He could swear it. Something to make her strangely silent, but eager, fluttering, nervous—something that prompted her as they neared the building, and the little hand clinging to her father's arm shook with strange excitement, to bend forward close to their friend and hostess, and just as the latter was about to hail some young officer on the steps, Lilian interposed. "Oh—please," was all she said, but her fingers had caught the fluttering fold of the mantle, and Mrs. Crook turned at once. "You'd rather not?" she asked, with quick, sympathetic understanding. "I won't then. Plenty of time. Let's watch the dance first."

And so saying she had marshalled them close to the southward windows, Lilian and her father at the nearmost, she and Mrs. Archer going on to the next.

It was Keler Beler's "Am Schoenen Rhein" they

were playing at the moment, with its sweet, weird, luring, mournful, warning Lorelei *motif* dominating in the waltz measure, and, with parted lips and clinging to her father's side, Lilian stood close to the window and looked and listened, saying not one word. There were but three couples dancing at the moment. There might as well have been but one for, within the hall and without, the eyes of all seemed fastened on that. Some strange caprice had prompted Evelyn Darrah to wear black that night—a grenadine, with cobweb lace and glinting spangles and sweeping train, the bodice cut low and displaying her shapely arms and neck and shoulders, enhancing the grace of her tall and slender form. Her dark hair was coiled in masses, yet here and there a curl or tendril fell upon the soft, polished skin, or floated about cheek and temple. Her eyelids, heavily lashed, veiled her downcast eyes. Her coral lips were slightly parted. Her almost queenly head was bowed as though to incline that little ear to catch the words he was eagerly pouring into it. Not a vestige of a smile was on either face, each was dark, sombre, beautiful, absorbed. His handsome head was bowed until the curling mustache swept her rounded, flushing cheek. In exquisite rhythm and harmony the two tall, graceful forms swayed in unison with the exquisite love music, every step, every motion perfectly attuned. It seemed as though no guiding were necessary. Slowly gliding, turning, reversing, he in his faultless uniform, she in her sweeping, diaphanous sable, seemed, without effort or the faintest exertion, fairly floating upon air. No wonder they sat or stood and gazed—these elders

along the bordering benches—these others among the dancers—these few, wordless, at the windows. Then, with the Lorelei melody lingering to the last, the sweet, sad music died away and the waltz was ended. People began to move toward the doorway. "They're going for their bite and sup," said Mrs. Crook. "See, there go the bandsmen. Shall—*we?*"

"I think not, if you don't mind," said Mrs. Archer with anxious glance at the other window, where Lilian still stood, looking straight at the doorway through which that couple had led and so many now were following. She had neither spoken nor moved, nor had he, her father. His back was toward them, but from the very pose of his head the wife well knew his eyes were fixed upon the face of his beloved child, with who can say what depth of sorrow, sympathy, yearning for her—with what passion of wrath and resentment for him. "Come," said Mrs. Crook briefly, for she, too, saw. Then Archer gently laid his hand upon the slender fingers that seemed clinching his arm, and with sudden little gasp or sob, and shiver, Lilian whirled upon him, her eyes big and dry and glittering. "Oh! wasn't it—didn't they dance—beautifully?" she cried, as he grouned his teeth and turned to lead her away.

And just at that instant—just as such things *will* happen, who should come chirruping round the corner but the chaplain and his wife, with Mrs. Chief Quartermaster and a guest from Camp Sandy, just in time to stumble upon Mrs. Crook and Mrs. Archer vainly striving to dodge and get home. It was too late. They were captured, surrounded, pounced upon. "Oh,

when did you come?" "Oh, *how* did you get here?" "Oh, *where* is Lilian?" etc., etc., and Archer, never hesitating, quick was he in action ever, instantly turned about. "This way, sweetheart," he murmured, in the fond father love that welled from his great heart. A few strides carried them back into the darkness, around by the westward end, where the clamor of voices and clatter of cups and plates at the supper room drowned other sounds, and then in the darkness he led his darling, voiceless still, across the little wooden bridge and up the gentle slope among the cedars, hoping by a wide detour to dodge these importunates and lead his child to her own room, and there mount guard over her until the mother came. There is a sorrow that passeth understanding, and is known not of all men—the mute, helpless, impotent sorrow of the father who feels the heartache, and sees the suffering of a beloved child, and cannot even trust himself to speak of it.

And Fate was still against them. The God that meant to cure was merciful and merciless as is the knife. Sinless as was this gentle flower, even she must suffer and endure, for here were obstacles again, even here across their path! They were upon them almost before they knew it, yet upon them unseen, unheard, for, absorbed in each other, this opposing couple knew nothing but their own affair, and well they might, for a sob was the first sound to catch the soldier's ear, a stifled cry, and then a deep, manly voice imploring, protesting, a torrent of murmured words, fond, assuring, caressing, passionate, a deluge of thrilling endearments, a mingling of sobs and kisses, for the woman's

overcharged nature had broken under the strain, and in the refuge of his clasping arms was sobbing her heart out on this new lover's breast. Archer, raging, would have brushed them by, but Lilian held him. "Not that way; oh, not that way!" she whispered hoarsely. And then he understood, and together they fled back the way they came.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was a merciful Providence, as many of the exiles later said, that brought the commanding general himself late that starlit evening back to Prescott. His stout mountain wagon, and special six-mule team had whirled him up from the Verde after the briefest of conferences with the cavalry colonel there in command. An Indian runner from Almy had reached them early that Thursday morning, announcing the return of Stannard and his troop, accompanied by Lieutenant Harris, 'Tonio and certain of the Apache-Mohaves, the arrest by civil authorities and attempted suicide of Case, and the further gathering under the wing of the law of José Sanchez, of Muñoz, and even of Dago, all of whom, it was said, were wanted at Prescott. Stannard found the Archers gone, found himself, as senior captain, temporarily in command of the post, and called upon to furnish military escort for the civil *posse comitatus*. Stannard was a soldier pure and simple. He would have shown as a mammoth bull in a china shop had he and his troop been at the moment in the Southern states, instead of the southwestern territory. He stood ready to do any amount of arresting the government might order. He was entirely willing to send a subaltern and a score of troopers to convoy the entire party—sheriff and deputies, posse

and prisoners—to the territorial capital, but, like the old war-horse he was, he balked, stiff-necked and stiff-legged, at the sheriff's demand that the escort should report to *him*—should be, in point of fact, under his orders.

Not to put too fine a point upon it, Stannard had said he'd see him damned first, whereupon the sheriff refused to make the trip, and appealed to the territorial authorities, while Stannard sent a runner up to district head-quarters for instructions. Each messenger had nearly ninety miles to go, so the race was about even, despite the fact that the sheriff's couriers were mounted and Stannard's runner went afoot. The uninitiated would have backed the riders to win, but Stannard backed the runner. The former were deputies and white; the latter was Apache-Mohave and brown. The former had a road and a roadside ranch or two, whereat they might and did obtain rest and refreshment. The redskin had only a trail, and no temptations. The Apache won out in a walk, literally a jog-trot. Luck as well as pluck favored the latter, for he found the department, as well as the district, commander at Sandy, and Stannard's instructions were started back that very morning. "Come up yourself to Prescott," they said. "Bring Harris and 'Tonio and such of 'Tonio's people as are necessary. Come prepared to stay a week at least, and be sure that Mrs. Stannard comes with you. Use your own judgment as to route and escort. Offer the sheriff the protection, but by no manner of means the command, of your party."

Having thus settled that question, the Gray Fox bethought him that it might be just as well to scoot for home, lest other councils should prevail about the capital. Such councils had prevailed, and in the recent past. He had still in mind the embarrassing episode of Willett's "instructed" descent upon Almy. In view of all the resultant complications he could not well forget it, and so, having finished his chat with Pelham, the tireless brigadier went bowling away by mountain road, the faithful Bright beside him, and was landed at his own door soon after eleven P.M. in abundant time to meet the situation on the morrow. Even in those days, when the stars went to the fighting force instead of the staff corps, it sometimes happened that a bureau officer had political wires to work.

And there were other reasons why he had come not a moment too soon. People had so little to talk about in those far Western wilds that they who had, as related, unexpectedly met our hostess and her guest in the darkness, and learned from them that they and Archer and Lilian had been "looking on for ever so long," must needs hurry back to the ballroom and tell it over and again. "Why didn't you bring them in?" "Why didn't you make them come in?" were the questions impulsively asked and not easily answered. They couldn't make them come in! Mrs. Crook said they were far too tired! They had only just come down to see how gay and pretty it all looked, and hear the music a minute, before going to bed! Now they were going to bed!

Then the people began looking for Willett and Eve-

lyn Darrah. There were not a few who would have been glad to be able to tell *them* this piece of news, but the bliss was denied. There was nothing unusual in dancers going out in the starlight, as had Willett and Evelyn. There was something odd about their not returning, however, and Mrs. Darrah presently whisked the colonel home to see about it. Then they did not return. They found the two on the dark piazza, just home, as said the daughter. She had a headache and could dance no more, and now would say good-night, which she said, and that left the colonel alone with Willett. The mother followed the daughter in-doors to see *if* she knew of the arrival, and then to see *that* she did. The father felt his way for a moment for some means of getting rid, without rudeness, of this disturbing young man, and found that he could not. Willett had something on his mind and, as soon as he saw it, Darrah was scared. In evident mental excitement Willett had followed, closed the door after her, then, pulling nervously at his mustache, had turned on the putative head of the house. "Colonel Darrah," he began in a moment, "I have something I feel I must say to you——"

"Then *don't,* my boy, for God's sake!" said Darrah. "Say it to Mrs. Darrah, will you? She—er—settles all—this sort of thing for me. She understands—er—Evvy—if anybody does—I'm blessed if I can, and—er—if you don't mind, I—I—I think I'll say good-night. Have a smoke or a drink before you go?" he asked, in enforced and miserable recognition of the demands of hospitality. "No? Well, of course,

you'd rather be back, I suppose," and so saying, he hoped to get Willett to go without being the one to either hear what Willett had to say or even to tell Willett what he knew—that at this very moment Lilian Archer, the girl to whom this young gallant's love and loyalty were pledged—was harbored there beneath their general's roof, where the lights were burning on the brow of the hill.

So not for half an hour did Willett get the news. He would not return to the hop room. He did not go directly home. He dimly saw the mule team, at spanking trot, go rattling up the road; saw and heard it draw up at the general's, and then whisking back to the valley to deposit Bright. He divined at once that the chief must have returned and congratulated himself that he would not be expected to pay his duty until the morning, especially if he at once saw Bright. So upon his fellow staff officer he projected himself with proper welcome, and the first question Bright asked was: "How are the Archers?" It had not occurred to him that no mail had come up for nearly a week—that Willett did not know that they had started from Almy three days before. Then Wickham came in and briefly said: "Certainly. They're up at the general's. They were down at the dance awhile, looking on through the windows," whereat Harold Willett's handsome face went white.

Late as it was he knew he should go over at once, and he did, and it was God's mercy, as Wickham said afterwards, that sent the bearded general, not the gray-haired, raging father to meet him at the door. There

had been a minute of tearful, almost breathless, conference between the devoted couple before Archer released his wife from his arms, sent her in to Lilian, and then came down as calmly as he could to face his host and hostess. There had been a moment or two, in the sanctity of their chamber, in which this other devoted but childless couple—the Darby and Joan of the old army—conferred swiftly over the situation, the wife briefly telling the soldier spouse of what she had seen, heard and believed, and a glance at Archer had done the rest. Crook saw the anguish in the face of his old friend, and had only measurably succeeded in calming him when Willett's step was heard upon the veranda. The chief sprang to his feet. Archer would have followed, but with a silent, most significant gesture, the commander warned his comrade back. Then, closing the parlor door behind him, confronted the young officer in the silence and darkness of the veranda.

What transpired in that brief interview was never told. Two or three couples, wearying of the dance, and wending their homeward way, saw the two tall, shadowy forms in the dim light, saw that one of them was standing strictly at attention, and knew thereby that the other must be the general, saw that the interview was very brief, for in a moment the caller raised a hand in salute, faced about, and went somewhat heavily down the steps and, avoiding both the main road and the pathway, disappeared in the direction of the bachelors' quarters under the hill.

At ten the following morning a buckboard called at Willett's door, and that young officer drove away in

travelling rig, with a valise by way of luggage, and when people inquired, as many did, and many more would have done had they followed their inclination, what took Willett away in such a hurry and—er—at such a time, all that black-bearded Wickham would say was, he heard it was a wagon. As for Bright, one might as well seek information of the Sphinx. There never was a man who, knowing all about a matter, could look, as more than one fair critic had been heard to say, so exasperatingly, idiotically ignorant. At noon, however, it was known that Willett's wagon stopped but a few moments on the plaza in the little mining town and capital, then shot away southward on the Hassayampa road.

Three days later the array of "Casually at Post" on the morning report of Fort Whipple showed an increase of something like a score. Lieutenant Briggs with a sergeant and a dozen troopers rode in the previous evening, after turning over a quartette of dusky civilians at the calaboose, and leaving a guard at the hospital in charge of a pallid, nervous, suffering man, whom a big-hearted post surgeon received with compassionate care. The doctor had known him in better days. It was what was left of the recent lion of Camp 'Almy—Case the bookkeeper.

'Among the arrivals extraordinary at head-quarters on the hill were Captain and Mrs. Stannard of Camp 'Almy, Captain Bonner, Lieutenant Strong, post adjutant thereat, and then, as Bright's special guest, was Lieutenant "Hefty" Harris, of old Camp Bowie, and as Bright's special charge were 'Tonio, sometime chief

of the Red Rock band of Apache-Mohaves, Kwonahelka, his associate and friend, with two young braves of the tribe, Kwonahelka's shy, silent wife and her ward, a motherless young Apache girl, sister to Comes Flying, he whose untimely taking off had so seriously complicated the Indian question in the district of the Verde. Bright had his Apache visitors comfortably stowed, and abundantly provided for, close to his own roof, and 'Tonio, charged with serious crimes against the peace and dignity of the people of the U. S. in general, and Arizona in particular, received with native dignity at the entrance to his canvas lodge callers and even congratulations—for great was the desire to see him—and, unbailed, unhampered, untrammelled by fetter, guard or shackle, calmly awaited his examination before the Great Chief with the coming of the morrow. Soldiers like Crook and the staff of his training knew 'Tonio and his lineage, and unlike Willett, valued his word.

And early on that morrow Willett reappeared, delivered certain despatches at the office long before office hours, betook himself to his quarters for bath, shave and breakfast, and behind closed doors and shrouded windows, awaited the summons if needed to appear before the department commander. His narrative long since had been reduced to writing. Between him and black-bearded Wickham there had been one significant interview, never till long afterwards given even to intimates on the general's staff. As for 'Tonio, to no one less would he plead his cause than the department commander himself, the Great White Chief.

Never in the chronicles of that sun-blistered land, home of the scorpion and rattlesnake, the Apache and tarantula, had that sun shone on scene so dramatic as that the Exiles long referred to as "'Tonio's Trial," and never, perhaps, was trial held with less of the panoply and observance of the law and more assurance of entire justice.

It was a great chief trying a great chief. The powerful commander of the department sitting in judgment on the once powerful head of a warlike band, long since scattered, absorbed, merged in neighboring tribes, worn down in ceaseless battling against surrounding forces and implacable Fate. Crook knew the Indian as it was given few men to know him, and in his own simple, straightforward way generally dealt with the Indian direct. But here was a case, as he well understood, where he who had once moved the monarch of these silent, encircling mountains, stood accused of treachery to the hand that had fed, sheltered and uplifted him, to the Great Father whose service he had sought, to the white chiefs, old and young, whom he had sworn to obey. If guilty he deserved the extent of the law, if innocent, the fullest vindication of the highest power he and his people knew and recognized. To no mere captain or even post commander would 'Tonio plead. To no agency official would he trust himself or his cause. There was one soldier chief whom every Indian of the Pacific Slope knew well by reputation and by name—the chief who spoke ever with the straight tongue and told them only the truth—the chief who never broke his word or let others ignore it. "Gray

Fox" they named him later among other tribes, but these of the Sierras spoke of him only as "Crook."

On the greensward, close to the assembly hall in the low ground, the council lodge was pitched—two huge hospital tent flies having been stretched from tree to tree, braced on uprights; and there, in a little semicircle, sat the general with his principal officers about him—gray-haired, pale-faced Archer, looking strangely sad and old, at his right—black-haired Wickham at his left, and high officials of the staff departments on either flank, the judge advocate of the department having a little table and chair at one side that all legal notes might be made. Half a dozen officers of the garrison, with Colonel Darrah at their head, grouped in rear of the council. Three or four orderlies stood about, but, by order, not a rifle or revolver could be found in the entire array. Seated to the right and left were officers prominent in the recent campaign—Stannard, Turner, Bonner, Strong and Harris among them, while at a distance, among the cedars and looking curiously on, were gathered the wives and families of the officers, with their guests and attendants—at a distance that the dignity of the occasion in the eyes of the Indian race might not be put in jeopardy by the presence of a woman.

Further still, on the other side across the trickling brook, to the number of near two hundred, men, women and children, soldiers, citizens and strangers, all in silence awaited the first act of the drama—the coming of 'Tonio with his retinue, marshalled by that expert master of aboriginal ceremonies, Lieutenant Bright.

And presently he came. No picturesque war bonnet distinguished him. No robe or mantle hung in stately folds about his form. 'Tonio sought not, as does his red brother of the plains, the theatrical aid of impressive costume. Tall, spare and erect, his sinewy legs and arms bare almost their entire length, his moccasins worn and faded, but his fillet, camisa and trailing breech-clout almost snowy white; destitute of plume, feather, necklace, armlet, ornament of any kind, unarmed, yet unafraid, with slow and measured step the chief approached the council tent, three of his warriors in his train, and, escorted by Bright, turned squarely as he came before the outspread canvas, entered beneath its shade, and stopping midway across the greensward, his head upheld, his black eyes fixed in calm, reposeful trust upon the general's face, halted and stood simply before him, saying not a word.

"'Tonio, will you be seated?" asked the general, and an orderly stepped forward with a camp chair. Even before the interpreter could translate, 'Tonio understood, motioned the orderly aside, turned and signalled to his followers, who quickly settled to the ground and seated themselves, cross-legged, in half circle beneath him, but the chieftain, accused, would stand. On the dead silence that followed, all men listening with attentive ear, even the women and children across the little ravine, hushing their nervous giggle and chatter, 'Tonio's voice was presently uplifted, neither harsh nor guttural, but deep and almost musical. In the tongue of his people he spoke seven words, and there seemed no need of the interpreter's translation:

"My father has sent for me. I am here."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE tribunal was this—"a method of procedure," as the acting judge advocate of this distant department took frequent occasion to tell us when the general wasn't around, "that would seem to have no warrant in law." Something to this effect being suggested to the general by the chief of the department staff, who went on to say that he supposed it was a case of "*Inter arma silent leges,*" the general's beard, which hid his mouth, was observed to twitch, and the wrinkles at the corner of his steely-blue eyes followed suit. It was a way of his when trying *not* to smile. Then Bright was heard to say that where the laws were silent, wise lawyers should be likewise, an epigram which long-legged Lieutenant Blake, of Camp McDowell, was delightedly and explosively repeating for the benefit of certain of the ladies looking on from among the cedars, even as 'Tonio appeared. Then no crier was needed to proclaim silence and declare this honorable court now open. Blake had come to Prescott ruefully expectant of official displeasure, and found it, so far as the chief of staff was concerned. But the general's greeting had been so cordial and kind that "Legs" took heart instanter. There was evidently something behind it.

Mrs. Crook had marshalled her forces early that

brilliant morning. Camp chairs and rugs had been sent down to the cedars, and with two of her favorites, Blake and Ray, in attendance, she and her guests from Camp Almy were seated where they could watch the proceedings and almost hear what was said. Many a curious glance was levelled in their direction, for by Mrs. Stannard's side sat Lilian Archer, pale almost as a calla, and rarely smiling or speaking, but, as all Fort Whipple could see, she was *there,* whereas Evelyn Darrah had not been out since the night of the dance. The colonel had explained, as he was probably bidden, that Evvy had contracted a severe cold, and her mother could not leave her. At least, said certain eager spectators, Willett must now be here, "for he is back from McDowell, or wherever he went." But even in this there was disappointment. The general had looked to that. Willett's accusation against the chieftain had been reduced to writing. It had all been carefully translated to 'Tonio, as had the reports of the post commanders of Camps Almy and McDowell. No further allegations had been, or were to be, made. With his witnesses in readiness, 'Tonio stood before the Great White Chief, the only man, save one, perhaps, to whom he would deign full explanation.

And now, with the agency interpreter at his left and the agent himself seated among the officials, an eager and nervous listener, 'Tonio strode forward a pace or two, halted, looked calmly round upon the circle of expectant faces, then, the observed of every eye, the object of absorbed attention, with occasional use of a Spanish phrase, but, as a rule, speaking only in the

dialect of the Apache, the tall chieftain began. With every few words he would pause, that the interpreter might repeat. It would be difficult, indeed, to translate his exact words or to portray their effect. To imitate the simple dignity of the aging warrior would be in itself a triumph of dramatic art.

"My father has told me of the lies against my people —and me. My people are not many now, and we are poor, often hungry and homeless, and our hearts are sore. We believed the promise of our father and we strove to obey him, but while he was gone, and we knew not where to find him, others came, unlike him. Our enemies, the Tontos, were many and strong. Their agent gave them much meat and bread, but my people were denied. The Tontos jeered at them; their young braves taunted ours, and our young women were afraid. The Tontos killed our white brothers and burned their homes, and said it was we. Then the soldiers came to arrest Comes Flying, and Comes Flying was killed, and my people fled far in among the Red Rocks. They had done no wrong, but they were afraid. Then the Tontos killed our white brother, Bennett, always our friend, and burned his house and carried away his wife and children. Our young men were few, but they followed and fought the Tontos and got the woman and her little ones and tried to hide them away among the rocks until white soldiers could come, but there came more Tontos. They were too many, and they kept between the soldiers and Comes Flying's band. They killed two of our young men and got the woman once more, and then my young chief, Capitan Chiquito, fol-

lowed, with only the braves you count on one hand, but he caught the Tontos and rescued the woman, and was shot. Gran Capitan Stannard brings me, and all his soldiers, and follows after the Tontos, but it was Capitan Chiquito who first reached her, and who would have saved her and her babies in their hiding-place, only he was held back—held back—" and with his head high and his black eyes sweeping the circle, 'Tonio stood and glared about him in search of an absent accuser. Then, with appeal in his gaze, he turned once more to the general.

"It is as 'Tonio says," answered Crook, with grave inclination of the head. "His brother chief, Captain Stannard, sustains him. Is it not so, Stannard?"

"Every word of it, sir!" was the blunt reply, as Stannard rose from his seat. "We found two Apache-Mohaves killed. We chased the Tontos into the mountains. Lieutenant Harris and 'Tonio, with Apache-Mohave scouts, rescued Mrs. Bennett, and led us." Whereat Archer's sad, white face was bowed upon his hands. Oh, that luckless despatch!

"We are listening, 'Tonio," said the general, as Stannard slowly resumed his seat, looking almost disappointed that there had been none to contradict or doubt his view.

"My father asks me why I left the camp after we had brought home our Capitan Chiquito. It was because my people came to the willows and called me. The sister of Comes Flying was weeping for her brother. Ramon and Alvarez were angered and talking battle and revenge, and Pancha came to warn me and to beg

me come or there would be much trouble. My young men were doubly angered. They said the white brother had broken his promise, had feasted the Tontos and had starved them, had killed Comes Flying and driven our women and children to the mountains. They had seen more. They had seen their chief struck in the face with the glove of the young soldier chief—who is not here." And again the black eyes sought everywhere throughout the circle. "Ramon, Alvarez and others had vowed that he should die because of Comes Flying and of me. It was for this they played all so many hours with the riders from the Verde. They would head them off and hold them. The soldiers would come to rescue, and maybe the young chief. If so, they would lure him out beyond the others, and they did. I could not break their will. I saw their plan only just in time. They were in hiding among the rocks beyond the ridge, with only one or two in sight before them. He was galloping straight into their trap. There was just one way to save him and be true to our pledge to the Great Father. I shot to kill his horse, not him. My rifle would have carried just as true had it been aimed at his heart. He who struck me at the ranch—and denounced me here—owes his life to 'Tonio."

In the dramatic pause that followed a murmur of sympathy and admiration, irrepressible, flew from lip to lip. He noted it, but gave no sign.

"The young white chief says again I shot or sought to kill him that night at the ford. Again I could have done so, and again I sought to save. He was my enemy. He was"—and here, with affection all could see, the

glittering eyes seemed to soften as they turned on Harris, sitting pale, silent and observant—"the enemy of this my brother and my friend. I would no longer go within the soldier lines. In spite of what I had done the white-haired chief ordered his soldiers to kill or take me prisoner. They could not find me, but I tried to warn my brother there was trouble—they would kill *his* brother chief, then there would be fearful war, but my brother was wounded still and could not come.

"Then the young stranger chief was lured out again by Sanchez—his people and mine. They swear to me they did not kill him—that the white man, Case, did that. He, too, hated him. But Sanchez lied to me. He promised to take back the pistol my people found the night I shot his horse, and he never did, nor messages I sent. So I know not who fired the shot, who clubbed him, *but* Sanchez had that pistol—Sanchez lied to me! I was not that night so near as the Picacho, and when the soldiers came to find me I went farther, with two of my people. We met the Great Chief's couriers. We met more Tontos. We fought them back and I was wounded. They took me to McDowell, and no man was unkind until the night they put me in the iron cell with Sanchez, and he told me I should never see the Great Chief, my father; that I should hang for shooting the white chief, Willett. When I slept he was there. When I awakened he was gone, and the iron bars were gone. I went out into the night—into the mountains—until I found my young chief. Then the truth was told me. Then we followed, and found Sanchez. Then my people heard

the story and helped me find the way to the cave where the boys were hidden. The Great Spirit of my fathers knows I have never broken my promise. That is all that 'Tonio can say. I have spoken."

And then as he finished and the last word had been translated, all in language far less vivid than his native tongue, all men seemed to breathe a sigh of relief and seek instinctively to rise and gather about him. The general slowly found his feet, rose to his full height, stepped straightway forward to where the Indian stood, placed his left hand on the gaunt and bony shoulder, and with his ungloved right seized and grasped and held that of the elder chieftain, his own eyes twinkling, moistening, as he spoke.

"'Tonio—Brother—the Great Father shall know, and if I live, all his people shall know, how deeply you have suffered, how truly you have stood our friend."

And then, still clasping the warrior's hand, Crook turned to his officers, for by this time every man was on his feet, every eye was again upon them, every face lighted with interest, and many with emotion. Silently the general glanced about him, and at his signal Archer came forward, his handsome old head bared, his fine eyes filling. At his approach the commander drew back a step, releasing 'Tonio's hand. Then the soldier who but a fortnight back had sought to prison, possibly to kill, this soldier of the desert and the mountain, following his superior's lead, held forth his hand, a thinned and trembling one, yet the clasp in which it took that sinewy brown one was one an Indian could

never doubt. Looking straight into 'Tonio's fearless eyes, the veteran spoke: "Tonio—Brother—I did you wrong. I beg your pardon and I ask your friendship."

For a moment, silence, then for answer came but the single word:

"*Hermano.*"

When presently hands unclasped and others began to gather about him, it was seen as Stannard came forward he had linked his arm in that of Harris, and would not be denied. The general caught sight of them, and a smile like sunshine lighted up his beaming face. "That's right, Stannard. This way, Capitain Chiquito! We all want you." And then, though by dozens now—officers, agent, interpreter and territorial officials—they were swarming about the impassive central figure, they gave way right and left that the two friends might meet, and 'Tonio, turning from Archer's handclasp, saw his young champion and leader, and the stern, dark features melted, the bold, fearless, challenging eyes softened on the instant. He would have sprung forward to some act of Indian homage, but Harris was too quick and checked him. Their eyes met. Then both hands—all four hands—went out at once.

It was at this juncture, as certain of the department staff began to bethink themselves of important duties awaiting them at their offices, that one of the old-time characters of the old army, a field officer of distinction in the war days, was heard to express himself somewhat as follows: "Well, whereaway is Willett now?" —a question that had occurred to every member pres-

ent, and to many a man and woman without the council, but this was its first audible expression.

"Willett," said the general calmly, yet in tone that all beneath the canopy could hear, "made known to me days ago that he desired to withdraw his accusation, but I had my reason for insisting. As to the question, where is Willett?—he is here to testify, if need be, before a civil court. We have still to settle with Sanchez."

Moreover, as the Indians finally moved away, Bright and Harris both escorting 'Tonio, there were emissaries of the agency at their heels, for in 'Tonio's train walked both Ramon and Alvarez, on whom it might be well to keep an eye.

But 'Tonio's trial—"'Tonio's triumph," as Blake declared it—was not yet over for the day. The watch-spring saws and tiny file found on Sanchez, when finally taken, had explained the method of that McDowell escape. With these and with bacon-rind to grease them, only a little time and labor had been needed, nor was there ever found proof against Corporal Collins, or the sentry, that either had connived at the subsequent escape of 'Tonio. He had awakened and found his undesired cellmate missing, and the window was clear. So that way he could have gone, though there were many who believed the door itself had been opened to him. In any event, he saw freedom without, and suspected wrong and treachery within. Why should he not go? Who was to blame him? Crook's cordiality to the accountable officer of the day, Lieutenant Blake, went far to show that he was far from

resentful of the result. It really looked as though the Gray Fox would rather 'Tonio had never been confined.

And later that winter's day, along toward sunset, another scene, far less dramatic and impressive, was enacted at the office of the sheriff, a mile away in town.

An adobe wall, some seven feet high, surrounded the corral, and beneath the canvas awning on the southern side certain offenders against the peace and dignity of Yavapai County had been assembled under the eye of tobacco-chewing deputies. There were the Sanchez half-brothers, 'Patchie and José, both shackled. There was Muñoz, similarly decked. There slouched Dago, unfettered, but carefully watched. There were two more of the riffraff of the redoubtable ghost ranch, and two of the victims of the more skilful play, and potent doping, of the proprietors. All were under surveillance, several under charges, but where was Case?

It was Blackbeard who answered that question at five o'clock, when, from the post ambulance, he and Bright sprang forth, and presently aided to alight a very solemn-looking civilian, shaved, dressed and groomed with extreme care, but for pallor and nervousness, a reputable-looking criminal—Case. Accused with assault with attempt to kill, the bookkeeper, none the less, had been taken in charge by officers of the army, with the entire consent of the officers of the law, and Sanchez the elder, José, that is, weakened at the sight of him. He was sober and clothed in his right mind, as Wickham meant he should be. Moreover, he looked no longer afraid. Case had met his master at

the game of bluff, and now, with nothing left to hope, had nothing left to dread.

Short work the sheriff made of the matter in hand. There had been a killing down on the Agua Fria, and the killer was still at large. Here was only a bungling attempt to kill, and everybody concerned was at hand.

"Case," said he shortly, "when you were brought here you swore it was 'Tonio who shot Lieutenant Willett."

"I didn't swear," said Case. "I stated; but either would have been wrong. I said it when myself accused and when I had been drinking. I am ready to tell everything I know."

"Then wait a moment," answered the official, turning to a deputy, who pulled at an inner door, and said. "This way, gentlemen," whereat everybody filed out into the corral where there was far more room, and where presently they were joined by the agent and his interpreter, by a little group of officers, Stannard, Strong and Willett—the latter very pale and weary-looking. A moment later the gateway swung open and in walked Harris, with 'Tonio by his side and two tribesmen following. The gate was quickly closed in the face of an eager knot of townspeople, but at sight of the assembled party the Sanchez brothers cowered still farther back beneath the shelter, and the sheriff ordered José out into the light. He came, yellow-white, and cringing.

"You said, first, that 'Tonio shot that man," and the sheriff pointed to Willett. "Did you lie?"

"*Si*," gulped the Mexican.

"Then who did it?"

José shrank. His eyes furtively, quickly swept the group, then fell again.

"You said Case—this man," said the sheriff, with a hand on Case's shoulder. "Did you lie again?"

"He—he shoot, an' run away."

"You lie, three times! Only one shot was fired and that from your own pistol. Here it is! Case never had it, for all you swore to it."

"Muñoz saw him—shoot!"

"That so, Muñoz? Come out here!" and a deputy collared and thrust him forth.

"*Si;* Case," answered Muñoz miserably.

And then at last the dago broke bounds. All the pent-up hatred of the months boiled over in his heart. All the fear vanished in presence of these supporters and at sight of these now abject bullies. Out he sprang, all vehement denunciation:

"Lie!" said he—"damn lie! Muñoz hit!—Sanchez shoot! All try kill. Then run—run, for soldiers come!"

It was then that Lieutenant Willett stepped forward and interposed.

"Mr. Sheriff," said he, "whatever my earlier opinion on the subject, I know more now. I know it was not 'Tonio. I believe it was not this—this gentleman—Mr. Case. If you will favor me a moment I can make it clear to you, but"—and here the heavily lashed, mournful brown eyes sought the group of Mexicans—"I should hold—those fellows."

And so, once more within the little office, Willett briefly told his tale. There were present Wickham,

Bright and Harris, the sheriff and one deputy. "I should be glad to have you call in Mr. Case," said he. So Case was summoned and came and took a chair by the chimney and bowed his head upon his hands.

"There had been a card transaction," said Willett. "I owed Mr. Case three hundred dollars, and he or his friends thought I was going to leave without settling. He sent me a note saying he wished to see me. It was midnight before I could go down. He had left the office, but hailed me from the window of Craney's shack. We met near the ford, had words, and I struck him—struck him twice, knocking him down, and then his friends, or followers, as I supposed, pitched upon me. I surely saw one Indian, and, knowing 'Tonio's —grievance, and being warned against him, that was the last idea I had, as I was knocked senseless. Mr. Sheriff, I refuse to enter any complaint against Mr. Case. He is—entirely blameless."

"That seems to let *you* out, Case," said the sheriff sententiously, but the bookkeeper never raised his head.

"Is there anything else I can say—or do?" asked Willett, holding his natty forage-cap at the side of his head. "It should be done now, for—I am to leave here—to-night."

It was then Case's turn. In an instant he was on his feet.

"Going?" he demanded, a strange, hungry look in his eyes. "I'm not yet free, and I've got to speak with you."

"There is no need," said Willett gravely. "I *know*."

"You mean?—you heard——?"

"My letters have told me—everything," was the quiet answer.

"And you are going?"

"Back to Portland—and to——"

With that he would have turned, but Case sprang forward. There was perceptible start among the lookers-on. It might mean another attempt. The sheriff seized him, but Case, with feverish strength, shook himself loose, and Willett turned back, faced him, and waited for him to speak. It was a moment before Case could find breath, then came the words:

"My God, man! Will you give me your word—your hand—on that?"

For all answer Willett drew off the dainty glove of white lisle thread, took the outstretched hand of Case, wrung it, and turned in silence from the room.

There were men who mounted and rode with him a mile or more that night, and came back silent and sorrowing, yet thinking better of Hal Willett than any of their number had ever thought before.

"He has gone to do the one square thing that's left him," said Old Stannard, as the buckboard whirled away, "and his resignation goes with him."

L'ENVOI.

That was many a long year ago, and for many a month thereafter men and women at Whipple and Sandy, McDowell and Almy would talk for hours about Willett, his strange character, his broken career. It

was not long before the truth, the whole truth, was known. Case for a time would not return to Almy. He found some work to keep him busy at Prescott, and would have had to do no work at all, said the agent of the Wells-Fargo, "if he'd kept his money, but he sent every damned cent of four hundred dollars to somebody up at Portland." He was forever on the lookout for the coming of the buckboard with the mail —we had no telegraph until '74—and his excitement over the receipt of certain letters and newspapers, along in mid-February, was something not soon to be forgotten. He had been sober and solemn as an anchorite for over six long weeks, and this night, to the joy of the gamblers in the Alcazar, insisted on "setting 'em up" for all hands, soldier and civilian; then, to their amaze, insisted further on their drinking to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Hal Willett, by gad! "for he's a square man at last."

And the news lacked no confirmation at the barracks. There came a missive to Wickham; there was a message to the general; there was a very earnest message to 'Tonio; there was even a letter in Willett's hand to Evelyn Darrah. No one ever saw its contents save the girl to whom it was addressed, but there came nothing to be forwarded to the Archers at Camp Almy. From that night among the cedars Lilian never again saw Harold Willett. It was a pitifully insignificant little packet of letters the young officer found on his desk the morning of his return from the Hassayampa road. It contained only the pages he had penned to his Lily of the Desert. The earlier ones were fond,

endearing, sweet as girl could ask, and had been rapturously welcomed, read and reread, kissed and fondled and treasured. The later ones were hurried, perfunctory, full of excuses, full, alas! of lies that he knew and that he hated himself for writing. There was not so much as a line from her, nor was one needed. Between the few words spoken by his general in the darkness of the veranda and that one conference with Wickham, Willett knew exactly what he had to face. Just as it had dawned upon him that breathless night at Almy, when the ravings of the Irish deserter told him that his sin had followed and had found him out, he realized here at Whipple that all was known and, for him, all was over. He had burned in vain the burning and accusing letters that poor girl in Portland had written him. Her mother at last, learning everything, had written to Crook, and, through Wickham, who had investigated both Case and the deserter Dooley, Willett received his *congé*. There should be no public break. It was to be announced that at his own request Lieutenant Willett stood relieved from duty as aide-de-camp to the department commander, and would proceed to rejoin his regiment in the Department of the Columbia; but even Wickham started with surprise and incredulity when, accompanying this application, at the close of 'Tonio's dramatic trial, Willett gravely handed him another paper—his resignation as an officer of the army.

"I do not understand this as—demanded," said Blackbeard, looking quickly into Willett's pallid face.

"You will, when you remember that my wife—and

child—would hardly be acceptable in army circles," was the quiet reply.

"You mean—you are going at once to marry her?"

"What else should I do?" said Willett.

And this it was that explained his unlooked-for escort beyond the borders of the little reservation, Stannard's words of commendation, and Case's ebullition at the Alcazar.

Case had not many more. Craney coaxed him back to Almy after awhile, where every one from Archer down to the drum boys showed him many a kindness, and where from time to time he received letters that seemed to bring him comfort, in spite of the fact that Bonner, Bucketts and even gruff old Stannard, when they spoke of it at all, were given to saying that there was little happiness in store for the poor girl at Portland, for Willett was not made of the stuff that kept man faithful long to any one woman. It was rumored for awhile that the little family, having moved northward to one of the new and booming settlements on the Sound, were living in poverty and seclusion, Willett's wealthy kindred in the East scorning him, as was to be expected, for the *mésalliance* and for his abandonment of the profession he was expected to adorn. But the embryo "Smart Set" and the tried old Service had little in common, at best. It was in the employ of the Engineer Corps that Willett found means to keep the wolf from the door, and the girl was happier longer than most people would have believed possible, for it was full three years before Willett's father died, and, relenting, willed him prosperity. Some time after

that there came a tale of Evelyn Darrah, but, as the best authority would say, "that's another story."

With Case, however, life seemed to have lost its inspiration. He wandered more and more from the paths of rectitude to those which meandered through the willows and the old ghost walk. The firm of Sanchez y Muñoz had gone to seed, the ranch to ashes, and the individual members to jail. Dago had accompanied Mrs. Bennett and the growing babies to her brother's ranch on the Agua Fria. The Indians had been gathered to their reservations, and 'Tonio, with Lieutenant Harris, has been assigned to service under the eye of the Great Chief himself. A new post, a big post, was projected nearer the reservation. It was rumored that Almy would then be abandoned and Case would not have even the ghost walk for his solitary moonings when the whiskey spell was on him, and the spells, though no more frequent, as the Scotchman would have it, were of longer duration. He had taken strongly, not strangely, to Stannard and his gentle wife, and it was to them he told at last the story of his troubles, and through them, long years after, it became known.

He was doing well in Portland, had fallen deeply in love with, and was engaged to, as pretty a girl as ever was seen, good and gentle, too; but she was young, the belle of her set, a beautiful dancer, and Case could not dance. She loved gayety, pleasure, music, and in those days they picnicked over to Vancouver, and danced in a big barrack to the stirring strains of the band of the Lost and Strayed, and why shouldn't the

Portland girls love to dance with the young officers? Why shouldn't Estelle enjoy dancing with such finished performers and partners? There was one at that time who outclassed them all, and in an evil day they met. It wasn't long before her fascination became infatuation, and either there or in Portland, or somewhere, they were forever meeting. It was not long before Case saw his world swept from before his eyes. He did his best with her, with her mother and friends, but she told him flatly that she loved Lieutenant Willett and would be no man's wife but his. That clinched Case's downfall—and hers, but not until after Case saw Willett at Camp Almy, and her mother's letters, and hers, began again to come, did he learn the worst. Then came Willett's devotions to Archer's gentle little daughter, and the rage within his soul overmastered him. He would not—he could not—bear to tell of Estelle's shame. He dare not, he owned it, oppose himself man to man, physically, to Willett, but he burned with desire for revenge. Sanchez and his kind were willing tools. Ramon and Alvarez, they told him, were thirsting for Willett's blood. It would be easy enough to shoulder it all on 'Tonio, if the worst came to the worst. Sanchez had Case deep in his debt, for monte had fascinated him when in liquor. They did not know Willett had left with Craney payment in full for their financial differences. They insisted on his seeing Willett and making him pay before he left the post. Dago had the run of the garrison, and Dago took the few lines that told Willett if he was a man to come down to the ghost walk and settle, dollar for dollar, man to

man, or the story of his Portland days should be told the Archers. Sanchez, Muñoz, and the two Apache-Mohaves were lurking there across the stream. Case watched for him from the rear window, saw him, and in spite of the doctor's precaution, counteracted by the whiskey he had hidden in an inner pocket, he slipped out in his stocking feet, took the path to the ford, and there met Willett face to face. It was all so easy. Sanchez knew 'Tonio was near, grieving that no answer came from Harris, signalling for a talk, ignorant of the fact that Sanchez had delivered neither the revolver nor the message. Case had with him only his knife, for he knew his confederates would be at hand. He vowed he did not know that they were bringing Ramon and Alvarez. Raging with jealousy, hate, desire for vengeance, and nerved by liquor, he had demanded his money. Willett contemptuously bade him seek it of his employer, and asked him how he dare doubt a gentleman, whereat, in a fury, Case told him, or started to tell him, why, and was knocked flat in a second. He sprang up, knife in hand, and rushed upon him a second time, only to be floored again, and the knife sent spinning. Willett seized it, and was standing over him, panting a bit, when felled by a crashing blow with a pistol-butt at the base of the skull. Then in terror Case fled the way he came, for he saw both Indians and Mexicans were on him, realized that murder was meant, and knew he would be involved unless he could instantly get back to his bed. Willett made a desperate fight, wounded Ramon, and might have killed him but for the timely shot from

the pistol of José. Case heard it, and the cry for help as he ran. So quick was the response of the sentry and the guard that the assailants, too, fled in fear, leaving their work unfinished. They had no fear of their drugged countrymen at the ranch. They were ready to help the soldiers hunt the Indians, and did, but José had dropped the old Navy Colt at the ford. They bought Dago's silence for awhile, for he, too, hated Willett, and it was so easy to charge the crime to 'Tonio. But, when they fell out among themselves, and the pistol was found, and then Case was accused, Dago let loose on Muñoz, and the secret of the attempted murder was out.

For a time thereafter Case felt dazed, benumbed; but, as Willett recovered, he took courage again, and more drink, and tried to shoot his worthless head off, he said, when they came to arrest him. But when he heard of Willett's doings at Prescott, and had been openly taunted by Dooley, he determined to lose his life another way, if need be, in bringing Willett to justice. He told it all to Wickham, and was amazed, yes, amazed at the result. He never dreamed that Willett at the eleventh hour would go to Estelle and make the only amend in his power.

For that matter, neither did any one else cognizant of the fact, especially Harris, who, having been the unwilling recipient of all poor Eastern Stella's confidences in the past, believed Willett still haunted by memories of her, and knew not this new and innocent and confiding Star of the West. He had his own sorrows to bear, and his heart was bitter within him at

sight of the woe in the sweet blue eyes of the girl who speedily went back to Almy, without ever having opened her heart to a soul except that devoted mother.

While Evelyn Darrah kept her room as much as a week after Willett's going, it was a wonderful fact that, during a visit of four days, Lilian Archer appeared in public with her father, rode, drove, played croquet, though she managed to avoid two dinners and a dance. She was very quiet, it is true. "She never *did* shine in society," said the Prime girls. But, under all this silence and fortitude, and the access of tenderness with which she clung to her father, Mrs. Stannard and others saw how near the little heart was to breaking, and there grew up among the exiles a feeling of love and admiration for this uncomplaining child, so suddenly grown old, that outlived the lives of most of them, for it has come down to those who, in the fulness of time, stepped into their places. They are gone now, nearly all—our bearded general and his beloved Mary, gruff old Stannard and his wise and winsome wife. Bright, Bonner, Bucketts, grim-visaged Turner, white-haired, noble Archer and his fond and cherished Bella, even Willett, but not, thank God, until better and brighter days had dawned on most of them, and of one of these days, and of 'Tonio, there is yet this to tell.

There had been a year in which the Archers took their little girl abroad. The old regiment had been ordered to an eastern station, and the change was welcome, for with all her bravery, and despite their fondest care, she drooped in Arizona, and there came a

longed-for opportunity they could not neglect. They were many moons away; they were for a time at regimental head-quarters on their return, and then, in days when nothing was so rare as advancement, came Archer's promotion to the colonelcy of the very regiment that had taken the stations of their former friends in Arizona. In a little less than two years from that eventful night among the cedars, the Archers, three, were once more welcomed to the general's roof, escorted the last ten miles of the dusty stage ride from the desert by Harris, whose letters to the general or to Mrs. Archer had been regular as the fortnightly mail. With the morrow he and 'Tonio were on hand to hail them, looking fit and spare and sinewy as ever they had of old, for these were strenuous days and stirring times in the Apache-haunted mountains—the Tontos had broken faith and were again afield.

Camp Sandy on the Verde was the centre of the storm. Pelham and his cavalry had just been sent to other climes, marching overland to "the Plains." Archer was needed at once in command of the district, and was speedily there established, and thither too went Crook, with Bright to write his orders and despatches, with Harris and 'Tonio to head the scouts. Thither presently went Lilian and her mother. The post was large, the garrison ample. There was active service that their own white-haired general welcomed eagerly, for Crook meant to the full that his loyal old friend and supporter should have all the credit that the campaign might bring him. But campaigns conducted under daily telegraphic promptings from dis-

tant superiors were not the brisk and independent matters of a few years back. There were too many advisers within easy, if expensive, reaching distance—too many "Friends of the Indian," and far too few of the soldier, close in touch at court. Crook himself was looking vexed and worried. It is so hard to serve God and Mammon, to grapple with the foemen at the front, the Press and the Pulpit at the rear. At the very moment when he had the "hostiles" hemmed between converging columns and sure of capture, his hand was held by orders from the East. At the very moment when the warriors at the reservation should have been watched and guarded against exhorters from without, the latter got within, and a powerful band stampeded up the Red Rock country and were gone. The news reached Archer toward eleven, one winter's night, and at dawn he, in person, with Harris and 'Tonio and twenty scouts and barely thirty mounted men, was climbing the rugged trail from the head of the Beaver in pursuit, leaving Bella and Lilian, brave, silent, yet tearful, at the post.

It was nothing new, this going forth of veteran division and brigade commanders of the war days, with a handful of soldiery, to cope with a band of savages on their chosen ground. Barely two years before the Modocs had asked for a talk with the general commanding and killed him. Only the year previous the Cheyennes lured out a lieutenant-colonel, with but a lieutenant's command, and picked him off. And so, two nights later, there was weeping at old Sandy, for a runner was in long hours after sundown with the

tidings that there had been a sharp and sudden skirmish among the rocks, that brave old Archer had been the first to fall, and that 'Tonio had been desperately wounded in the effort to save the veteran's life.

They started them homeward within the week, Archer calm, conscious, suffering much, but as, the skilled surgeons told the wife and daughter who had rested not until they reached him, with good hope of recovery. It was 'Tonio for whom they felt the keenest apprehension. 'Tonio had received a bullet meant for the soldier who had once decreed his death, and Archer's anguish was more for him. With them, on the slow homeward way around by the old Wingate road, was Harris, sleepless from anxiety and distress, watching night and day by the side of his two heroes, filling all with wonderment at his endurance; and with Harris, much of the time, by the side of both father and father's self-devoted savior, was Lilian.

They brought them back to Sandy. They nursed the general back to life and partial strength. But age and wounds and sorrows all had told on the Mohave chieftain, and slowly he sank, despite their every effort and the doctor's skill. They had pitched a little tent fly for him—he would not be borne within doors—and shaded it with brush and willow, yet left the southward view open so that he could look out upon the broad valley and see the shadows of the mountains steal across it as the sun went westering. He seemed to love to watch the morning flame on the bald summit of the huge peak so close at hand; it made him think of the Picacho about whose base he had sported as a

boy. He seemed to love to see Ramon and Pancha hovering ever about him. He would look at them, take their hands, then place their hands together and hold them between his own. But most of all he loved to see Harris bending over him, moving about him, and when Lilian came and gave him drink and touched his fevered head, his glittering eyes would soften and follow her with such a world of wistfulness as though they would speak the longing of his heart. Then he would look from her to Harris, and from Harris back to her, in a way that sent the blushes surging to her forehead, and the sight of those blushes set that young soldier's heart to bounding.

One beautiful afternoon, when the sun was slanting low and the great dome of the peak was all agleam with crimson and with gold, they were gathered about his shelter, for the spirit had been wandering and his strength was almost gone. Without the canvas, their women weeping with Pancha, their young men silent and sad, a group of the old band hovered along the slope of the low mesa. It was thought he could hardly survive the night, and with the sinking of the sun his mind seemed clouding more, and he called, over and over, for "Chiquito," who knelt there clinging to his hand. Even Archer had come, leaning heavily upon his crutches, and Bella, his wife, and Lilian—Lilian upon whom the dying eyes rested again and again. 'Tonio was now too weak to lift a hand; he could not signal; but something in his gaze seemed to call her to him irresistibly. He was breathing with such difficulty that the surgeon, bending over him on the other side of the

pallet, slipped an arm beneath his shoulders, Harris from his side aiding, and together they slowly raised him almost to a sitting posture, his weary head resting on "Chiquito's" shoulder. But the eyes still sought Lilian, and Archer, watching, murmured to her, "Go."

To take his other hand, feebly plucking at the light coverlet, she had to kneel so close to Harris that he could feel the swift throbbing of her heart against his arm, and 'Tonio, looking now into the two young faces so near together, so close to his own, began with all his remaining strength slowly drawing her little white hand toward the lean and sinewy fingers that clapsed his right, whereat her bonny head drooped lower, her bosom heaved; she seemed at once to read his purpose, and, with the instinct of the maiden, to gently resist. But the almost instant reproach and pleading in the fading eyes melted and unnerved her. Harris, too, had seen, and noted, and understood, and his own heart, through all its sorrowing, was beating vehemently; his own right hand, without releasing 'Tonio's, crept forth in search of hers, and presently, trembling, but resisting no longer, the lily-white, slender fingers lay softly within the young soldier's clasp, and a big, hot tear fell upon the back of the brown and withered hand that, almost pulseless, drooped upon them both as though in benediction.

Overcome with emotion, Mrs. Archer, watching, breathless, dropped her head upon her husband's shoulder and sobbed convulsively. The last brilliant, dazzling beams of the dying day had lifted from the crest of the huge dome that shut the valley, and left

it dark and sombre; and 'Tonio's eyes, turning upon it for the last time, seemed to note the change; and the flitting spirit, wandering back to the old, old boyish days, and the legends of his people, spoke once more. The gathering darkness, the plash upon his hand, the resemblance to the mountain that guarded his babyhood and youth, all probably had worked their spell, for the pallid lips began to move, and in the silence of the lowering night a few words in his native tongue were faintly heard, and hot tears gushed from the eyes of his young chief, friend and brother, as, in answer to the doctor's quick, questioning glance, Harris brokenly murmured the translation:

"When the Picacho hides his head in the clouds, then will there be rain."

And the clouds had lowered, and the day was done, and there was rain of tears from even soldier eyes for 'Tonio—Son of the Sierras.

THE END.

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